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*Books by*  
COMMANDER EDWARD ELLSBERG

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ON THE BOTTOM  
THIRTY FATHOMS DEEP  
PIGBOATS  
S-54 *and* OTHER STORIES

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# OCEAN GOLD

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*by*

COMMANDER EDWARD ELLSBERG

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS*



DODD, MEAD & COMPANY  
NEW YORK

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# DATE DUE

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almost superhuman at times, but we can trust Commander Ellsberg, the man primarily responsible for the raising of the Submarine S-51, to give us a true story of diving as well as an exciting one.



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**Twentieth printing**

**PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**  
**BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC., BINGHAMTON, N. Y.**

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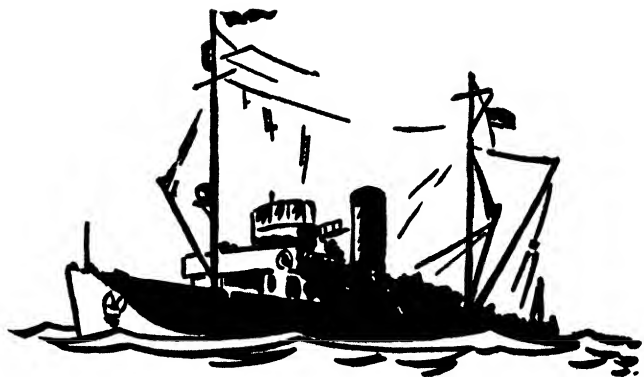
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## CHAPTER I

"DON DIEGO ARENDA? Don—Dieg-o? Who the devil is he?" Philip Ramsay stretched his tired legs out on the bed, stared listlessly across the narrow room from the card in his fingers to the landlady filling the door. "Tell him to shove off, Mrs. Ainslee. I'm too weary to talk to anybody."

"But 'e says 'e must see you, Mr. Ramsay. And 'e's been 'ere three times today, though I told 'im the first time y're only 'ome evenin's. And I'm sure 'e's no bill collector," added Mrs. Ainslee cheerfully; "'e's Spanish."

"Thanks for the information. With a name like that I took him for a Russian. Spanish, eh? Don't you know Spigs are as bad as anybody when it comes to making a duffer down on his luck cough up? But what's the difference? I don't owe him anything, and the only thing that interests me just now is a little shut-eye. Shoo him out and quit bothering me!"

Ramsay closed his eyes, rolled over toward the wall, wearily drew his legs up to relieve his calves, aching from his hopeless trek from office to office, chasing down even the most nebulous chance of connecting with a payroll. Gone now was that dream of breaking into another executive job like the aircraft position which had led to his resignation from the Navy—and had then faded into thin air, along with the company offering it, at the first contraction of the speculative bubble. Any job now. Wearily he opened his eyes, regarded dully the fading pattern in the moldy wallpaper. Gone to seed. So had he. He half groaned, thinking of the clean steel bulkheads with their fresh green paint that had formed his cabin on the *Cheyenne*. A plain fool to have tossed up his commission for a glittering rainbow. That wallpaper irritated him. And so did Mrs. Ainslee and her second-rate boarding house. Had that woman cleared out yet? He looked over his shoulder.

"Beggin' yer pardon, Mr. Ramsay, but I already told the gentleman you was in, and 'e sez as 'ow 'e must see you. So 'e's still waiting in the parlor. Please, Mr. Ramsay, won't ye see 'im?"

"All right, all right," grumbled Ramsay, "I can see if I'm going to get any rest I'll have to get rid of him first. Tell him I'll be right down." He pulled himself to a sitting position, started to grope in the dim light for his shoes. Don Diego Arenda? Who might he be? A vague recollection stirred him. "But I'm not going to get mixed up in any South American

revolutions, even if I am broke," muttered Ramsay, stumbling from the dimly lighted hallway into the parlor.

"Ah, Teniente Ramsay, I am honored to shake your hand!"

Ramsay looked quizzically at the figure bowing before him. A South American, all right. Yes. He remembered him now. That Peruvian naval attaché in Washington who had always pestered him for information while the Fore River crowd were building that sub for the Peruvian navy.

"*Amigo mío*, I am overjoy! How I have searched for you!" He gave Ramsay's hand a final squeeze, bowed again, waited till the puzzled Ramsay slumped into Mrs. Ainslee's dilapidated sofa, then drew a chair close in front of him.

"Thanks for the kind words, but why the bother? I'm just a plain 'cit' now, and I know less about what's what in the Service than a fresh caught gob. I'm afraid you've wasted a lot of your country's valuable time looking me up, señor."

"My country's time? Ah, no!" The visitor shook his head sadly. "No longer am I in our Navy either. Brigands, murderers! They have seized the government. My poor friends! The Minister of Marine, he is slain defending the capitol. El Presidente? In prison if he is still alive. *Quien sabe?*" Señor Arenda's voice broke; he paused while Ramsay, somewhat amazed at this vehement outburst, muttered a few sympathetic phrases, the while wondering

what his caller was driving at. What had all this to do with him?

Señor Arenda, his olive face twitching as his mind apparently relived that bloody scene in the sun-drenched plaza at Lima, remained a few minutes silent, his unseeing eyes wandering around the room, then came to with a start as a sight of the frayed velvet portières draping the hall entrance brought him back to reality.

"Pardon, my friend, I forget where I am. You wonder why I am here, yes? It is simple. You remember perhaps the *Santa Cruz*?"

The *Santa Cruz*, eh? So that was it. A slight flicker of disillusionment twisted the corners of Ramsay's mouth as he regarded the intent figure before him. Another idiot bitten by the lost treasure bug. And a Spig this time. Well it affected them all alike. The *Santa Cruz*? Ramsay nodded, leaned back resignedly on the worn sofa, drummed his heels impatiently against the floor, wondered how best to get rid of his questioner speedily and get back upstairs to stretch his tired legs again. The *Santa Cruz*? Bunk!

"Ah, you remember her?" Señor Arenda leaned forward excitedly. "*Bueno!* Then you will understand why I search for you so long!"

"Oh, I understand all right." Ramsay tried to conceal his disgust. "But why bother me about that empty tub? I remember, a year or two after I left the Service, I read in the newspapers about an expedition that cleaned her out clean as a whistle. Sorry, but I'm

not interested. I know too much about diving to bust my guts for the privilege of just looking at the water-logged timbers of an old hulk that's been sunk three hundred years. Excuse me, but I've got a tough day tomorrow looking for a job, and I've got to get some rest." He gripped the arm of the sofa, wearily started to rise.

"*Amigo mío*, wait!" Arenda raised an arm in protest, gripped Ramsay's shoulder, gently forced him back on the sofa. "Empty tub! It is not so! The newspapers, what do they ever know of the facts? It is different, very much different! Attend. You will see. A job? Bah, you will no longer weary yourself in an office, the subway, a job, office hours, a boss and worry about money. And this house!" His eyes swept disdainfully over the hair sofa, the rubber plant, the outmoded chandelier with its flickering gas lights reflected in the myriad glass pendants, the dusty what-not in the corner, the faded plush-covered chairs, the frayed portières. "For a gentleman, for an officer, my heart bleeds that you must live like this!" He paused for breath and fixed his astonished auditor with a flashing eye. "You will believe me, señor. You know el Commandante Carroll?"

"Know Commander Carroll?" In spite of his irritation, Ramsay laughed. "Certainly I know Commander Carroll! My old chief through two submarine salvage expeditions? I wish I'd stuck in the Navy with him, but like a fool I got out after that last sub job, and now look where I've landed!"



"*Si, señor*, I understand. Since *la revolución* in my country things are not also so good with me. But courage! I have the idea, still some friends, some money, and with your skill!" Señor Arenda waved his hands excitedly, leaned forward on his chair.

"A year ago, while still I am *capitán*, still *attaché* in Washington, there comes to me a sailor once in your navy, the Chief Torpedoman Joe Hawkins. Him you know?"

Ramsay nodded. The air of resignation with which he had been listening instantly faded. Joe Hawkins, perhaps the best diver they had on that sub job of Block Island. Joe Hawkins was too realistic, too sensible to be part of any cock and bull adventure. If Joe Hawkins was in it, perhaps there was something behind the wild ideas of Señor Arenda. Ramsay listened attentively as the Peruvian, catching the slight nod, continued.

"Joe Hawkins has a sad story. He was with three other divers under Commander Carroll successful on the salvage expedition on the *Santa Cruz*; they recover much gold from her hulk and the rest is easily in sight when—Carramba! They are attack by pirates, hi-jackers now you would call them. They fight, they beat off the enemy, they escape, but—too many of their crew are killed, they cannot proceed, the expedition is over. They are satisfied with what they have. Consider! Joe Hawkins, what you call him—a gob, yes? Joe Hawkins for his share receives a quarter of a million dollars in gold! Magnifico!

Joe Hawkins, he is rich, he is through with the sea, he is through with diving, he will enjoy life. With so much money he will be careful, so will his shipmates, the three brave divers who have worked with him. So what do they do? Ah, señor, you will weep for them. They return all to Boston with el señor Porter who has back the expedition, fitted out the diving ship, himself worked with them. El señor Porter, his uncle, is a beeg Boston banker, he advises them. Prudence. With so much money they must be careful. He invests it for them. For two years, for three years, they live like kings; then—Sangre de Cristo! In Paris Ivar Kreuger shoots himself. And their money? It is all invest in Swedish matches—it is gone! And soon to me in the Peruvian legation in Washington comes Joe Hawkins, *desgraciado*, what you call, broke? But, ah, señor, with what a story! In the *Santa Cruz* at the bottom of the sea there is still gold, jewels! With his own eyes he, Joe Hawkins, has seen them. Never did he expect to go back. But now, what can he do? He is poor, hungry, desperate. He suggests another expedition. The *Santa Cruz* is near Peru; for a moderate share he offers me the information, the Peruvian Navy can furnish the salvage ship, he will dive again on the wreck.

“But Joe Hawkins, he is only a gob, he does not understand. It is no more possible in my Navy to take warships to salvage treasure than it is in yours, señor. But the idea, I am overwhelmed with it. Privately much can be done. I write to the Minister of

Marine in Lima. I wait, a week, two weeks, three weeks. Meanwhile I give Joe Hawkins money to live. A month, then comes a letter from Peru. The Minister of Marine is agreeable. He, together with el Presidente, and a few friends will provide the funds. They cable me money, two hundred thousand soles to buy equipment, charter a small vessel. I am ordered to bring with me Joe Hawkins, the other divers, return immediately, to Callao. Pronto! I am transported with joy at their enthusiasm. I send for Joe Hawkins, he goes to New York to get his ship-mates, to procure some diving equipment, when—*Madre de dios, comes la revolución!* It is all over." The anguished Peruvian continued slowly, "My friends are dead or in jail, no longer dare I show my face in Callao!"

A little stunned trying to keep up with the torrent of exclamations, Ramsay sat silently through the harangue, moving jerkily now and then to avoid being struck by Señor Arenda's more violent gesticulations as he strove to make plain his ideas.

The little Spaniard recovered his breath, shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"For a while, *amigo mío*, all seemed over. I am a man without a country. My powerful friends are gone, my plans are all destroyed. I, too, am *todo desgraciado*. And then comes Joe Hawkins again with another idea.

"'Capitán,' he says, (to him I am still 'capitán') 'have you not the money yet?'"

" 'Si, señor.'

" 'Well,' he says, 'quit bellyachin' about Peru an' yer old shipmates; get some American to command this expedition and let's shove off.'

"Joe Hawkins, he talks like a gob, but his advice, she is good. But whom should I get? El Comandante Carroll, he who first commanded the salvage work, he is no longer interested. All his share from the *Santa Cruz* he invested in Liberty Bonds not in Swedish matches. Besides now he is married, he commands a new submarine, he is satisfied in the Navy. I waste two months finding all this out. Who next? Again Joe Hawkins has more ideas. El Teniente Ramsay who was second in command in the submarine salvage work. Joe Hawkins is very enthusiastic over him. *Un hombre bravissimol*! Endeared to all! But where is he? No longer in the Service? *Bueno!* He will be free to go. But how to find him? The Navy Department has only the aircraft company as a forwarding address. I go there. The receiver for the aircraft company knows nothing now where are the executives of the late company. For weeks I search for you. At last I find you here, argue with la Señora Ainslee that I must see you. Señor, now I have found you, we must proceed. You yet have doubts about that treasure? Listen but one moment to Joe Hawkins and—"



## CHAPTER II

"YEP, lieutenant, them's the facts; that Señor Arenda's spun the yarn straight. We'd lifted out just about half them gold ingots an' young Porter was on the bottom makin' a play to burn open an iron-bound chest which we ain't touched yet an' which musta had something special, maybe jewels, seein' as it's a strong-box inside a strong-room; and even back in the old days on the Spanish Main the Spaniards weren't goin' to that much trouble just fer nuthin'. Well as I was sayin', young Porter had just started workin' on the hinges and locks o' that chest with the underwater torch when up over the horizon steams a shipload o' Spig hi-jackers, an' the first thing ye know, we're all fightin' fer our lives. I been in the Navy through one war an' two insurrections but I ain't never seen no fightin' like that before. We tries to keep 'em off with a machine gun, but they boards us, an' before ye kin decide what it's all about, we're fightin' with knives, knuckles, and pistol butts, it's that close. We put up a hell of a scrap but it sure looks like taps fer us in a few minutes, coz even if we clean up the bunch o' pirates on our deck, there's a reserve gang o' the worst collection o' cutthroats I ever seen banked on the fantail o' that craft along-

side, only waitin' fer elbow room to work so's they kin dig their knives into our ribs. An' then just when everything looks hopeless, with half our crew dead 'r wounded, that pirate ship alongside takes one hell of a trim by the stern and slides through the surface o' the ocean so quick it makes you dizzy to watch her sink. I didn't know it then, but that kid Porter who was on the bottom when the fight started, and who we'd all forgot about ('cept his tender who was on the off side o' the ship from the scrap) had come up from the *Santa Cruz* with the torch, burned a big hole underwater in the bottom o' that ship, an' pulled the neatest job o' scuttlin' a vessel that's ever been done. An' that settled the battle. With their shipmates drownin' alongside by the dozens, the pirates on our deck lost heart an' surrendered. An' glad we was to have 'em too, I kin tell ye, lieutenant, 'cause we was nearly all cut to pieces. But the expedition ended then an' there, an' we took the gold we had aboard an' all come north—that is all 'cept the poor lads that went over the side sewed up in their hammocks."

Joe Hawkins heaved a deep sigh at the recollection.

"When I got my share, I thought I was through with divin', but I guess I got another cruise comin' in the salvage navy yet. I always wondered what was in that chest in the *Santa Cruz*—now I'm gonna find out."

"*Absolutamente!* Did I not say you would be-

lieve?" Señor Arenda twisted in his chair, gazed from Joe Hawkins to the absorbed visitor across the table from him.

Lieutenant Ramsay shook his head slightly.

"Not yet, I'm sorry, señor. I believe Joe, all right, because I've worked with him enough to know he's O.K. in his reports, but that doesn't settle it by a long shot. When was all this, Joe?"

"Four years ago, lieutenant, about a year after we salvaged that last sub."

"Four years ago?" Ramsay looked questioningly at the men facing him. "And well out of the steamer lanes off Ecuador, wasn't it? How do you know someone else hasn't cleaned out what you left?"

Hawkins' bronzed face expanded into a broad grin.

"Someone else? Say, that wreck's in thirty fathoms o' water, and I don't have to explain to you, Mr. Ramsay, what that means. There's mighty few divers kin *work* at that depth. Then if that wasn't enough, natcherly the story we give out was we'd salvaged everything. Only the divers an' Lieutenant Carroll knows the real facts, an' none o' us has ever gone round blowin' off about the straight dope. An' finally, lemme tell you if any o' these wildcat salvage expeditions had ever gone monkeyin' with the *Santa Cruz*—you know the kind o' expeditions I mean, the ones with loud press agents an' trick divin' suits an' Jules Verne ideas an' lurid circulars to sell stock to a lot of easy marks—well if one o' them outfits *had* ever

tried work on the *Santa Cruz* they woulda soon folded up their sucker lists an' moved on to somethin' more promising. For the *Santa Cruz* is a real job now—that pirate ship we scuttled sank right on top o' her an' squashed her clean outa sight in the ooze. It's gonna take real divers now; no crazy ideas that these wild promoters keep feedin' the public'll ever get anything outa the *Santa Cruz*."

Ramsay reflected. He knew Joe Hawkins well enough to put implicit faith in anything Joe had had a fair chance to observe. And certainly in this case it sounded as if Joe knew what he was talking about. If Joe said so, the gold was there, that was evident, but—salvage expeditions were expensive. And treasure hunts were dangerous. He looked quizzically at the Spaniard.

"Well, señor, I'll accept the story. How about finances? It takes more than divers to put one of these things across."

Señor Arenda sprang up, seized Ramsay's hand, shook it enthusiastically.

"*Amigo mío*, I knew you would believe after hearing el Señor Hawkins. It is settled. Money? Did I not say that just before *la revolución*, from Peru I received two hundred thousand gold soles? It is in your National City Bank, not even *un centavo* have I taken to live on! Bravo, Teniente Ramsay! You will accept the command!"





### CHAPTER III

ALONGSIDE a pier in Jersey City, Ramsay looked fondly aft from the bridge of the *Lapwing* to the main boom just swinging inboard with a cargo netting full of stores. His blood tingled as he took in each detail of the old ship, sister to the vessel from which he had worked with Lieutenant Carroll over two submarines. Five years since he had been to sea. It hardly seemed possible. And here she was, as much like his old *Falcon* as two peas.

What a career that class of ships had had! Built during the war as mine sweepers for service with the Grand Fleet in the North Sea, a few converted afterward to submarine salvage ships, one of which already had to her credit a record of two subs lifted.

The rest had been sold when the Navy was demobilized after the war and had become prosaic ocean-going tugs. Such had been the *Lapwing's* fate till, for the original venture on the *Santa Cruz*, she had been fitted out as a replica of the *Falcon*, and after that adventure had been sold back to the Navy as a salvage ship, only to be once again decommissioned and offered for sale when all naval activities were curtailed in a fit of national economy. Ramsay had bid her in at auction for a trifle, only sixty

thousand dollars. With all the special equipment in her, she couldn't be built for half a million. And here she was, his. Well, technically his, anyway, for he was the registered owner, even if Arenda had put up the cash.

His breast swelled with satisfaction as he looked around. His first command! Skipper now, no longer subordinate to anybody; once on the high seas, master of all on board. And hardly a month ago he had been wearily tramping from office to office, envying even each clerk his job.

A shrill blast of a boatswain's pipe cut the air, broke his reverie. The cargo netting, empty now, swung outboard and down on the pier, where a gang of stevedores started to roll boxes and bales into the netting. Ramsay watched it reflectively. Diving hoses in the bales; diving gear, helmets, breastplates, in those boxes going into the after hold; and probably in those boxes going forward, the machine guns and cases of rifles into which had gone the last four thousand soles of Señor Arenda's bank credit. Ramsay shrugged his broad shoulders; he would rather have spent the money for more diving gear and more provisions, in case the work dragged out over long, but there was no question about it—they dared not venture out unarmed.

The short winter twilight faded, darkness came. Cargo lights flashed on from the *Lapwing's* superstructure, lighted brilliantly the stern. The pile of cases on the dock melted as the boom swung in and

out; the winches creaked as load after load shot down the after hold. The last case disappeared inboard, the boom was secured, the cargo lights turned off. The loading was finished. The stevedores vanished, the deserted pier became strangely quiet. In the morning, the *Lapwing* could sail.

Weary but content, Ramsay turned to descend, then paused on the bridge in unaccustomed awe. Across the darkness of the North River the magic of the Manhattan view burst on him, myriad lights gleamed from jagged cliffs penetrating far into the sky. Nothing in the world like that scene, the towers of Manhattan glowing across the water. For a moment he stopped, drinking in the beauty of that sight, then with a wry smile, as he remembered how he had wearily tramped through those skyscrapers in search of work, he turned to the ladder on the starboard side of the wheelhouse. New York—a fairyland when you had money, a fierce desert when you were broke. Ramsay gripped the rail, went down the ladder to his cabin, threw himself on the bunk. Every inch of his six-foot frame cried for rest.

The last month had been a hard strain. Getting the ship, getting her fitted out, getting a crew—if it had not been for Joe Hawkins he could never have done it. Except for signing checks, Don Diego had been worse than useless. First his desire to man the ship mostly with Peruvian refugees—excellent patriots perhaps, but as sailors—! Ramsay had finally compromised that by signing on the only three who

had ever seen a ship in any other capacity than passengers. Then that hot discussion when Don Diego had wanted to spend all the money that was available for diving gear on a couple of metal diving suits—marvellous contraptions which kept the pressure off the diver, but prevented him from doing any work—and take the inventor along in the bargain. That had nearly disrupted the expedition, before another compromise settled it. The metal suits were in the hold, unpaid for until their worth was proved, but the inventor at least was staying in Brooklyn.

Well, it was all over. Everything was aboard, their clearance papers in order. At three in the morning, with the turn of the tide, the mooring lines would be cast off and the *Lapwing* would slip away in the darkness. Only Señor Arenda and Joe Hawkins were left to come aboard, and the expedition was ready to go.

A moment of uneasiness came to Ramsay as he considered Arenda's prolonged absence. Don Diego had reserved both cabins forward of the wardroom for himself, without saying why. What did he mean? Was he intending after all to bring that crazy diving suit inventor aboard at the last minute, counting on Ramsay's giving way and taking him along rather than delaying the sailing? These Spigs were queer—probably that was it. Ramsay clenched his teeth. He wasn't going to be handicapped by idiots with warped notions about diving when work had to be done. Arenda couldn't get away with that. If that nut came

aboard, he was going ashore again or Don Diego could start looking for a new skipper. And with that much decided, Ramsay rolled over toward the bulk-head, turned out the light, relaxed, and gradually dozed off.





## CHAPTER IV

A VIOLENT rap on the door. Ramsay awoke with a start, half slid off the bunk in the darkness, fumbled for the light, switched it on, sang out:

"Come!"

The door swung open. Joe Hawkins, breathless, stumbled into the little cabin, burst out:

"Lieutenant, quick, get the rest o' the boys on deck and heave the guns overboard!"

His eyes still blinking at the unaccustomed light, Ramsay stared uncomprehendingly, finally mumbled:

"Heave our guns overboard? What's the matter with you, Joe? Are you drunk?"

"No, and I ain't been drinkin', neither. Quick, I tell you! We only got a few minutes! I just left Don Diego over in New York and beat it here through the tunnel four bells an' a jingle in a taxi. A Federal marshal an' a gang o' deputies is comin' over on the ferry with a search warrant an' an attachment! Señor Arenda's been tipped off that some Spigs from that revolutionary junta back in Peru who've been trailin' him fer a week, have just sworn out a warrant that the *Lapwing's* sailin' on a filibustering expedition loaded with guns to start a counter revolution

down there, an' the marshal's on his way to make a search. If they find any guns, they'll tie the ship up in the courts fer a year maybe, an' gettin' her released will queer everything. Arenda says heave over the guns an' sail without him. An' move quick! That marshal'll be here any minute!"

Thoroughly awake now, Ramsay seized his cap and dashed for the door.

"I understand Joe, but don't turn out the crew. Get Tom Williams and Bill Clark and meet me in the armory on the orlop deck forward. And tell the quartermaster to haul in the gangplank!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" Hawkins shot out of the cabin and down the ladder while Ramsay, seizing a bunch of keys over his desk, slipped out through the ward-room and down the companionway leading to the forecastle hold. Down one more deck and he found himself in a narrow passageway blocked with sturdily made cases, while on the starboard side behind a heavy wire mesh grating could be seen, stacked in high tiers, boxes of ammunition. A fair sized armament for a ship—four machine guns, six cases of rifles. Ridiculous that anyone would try to run a revolution, however, with so little; but no use arguing that with a thickheaded marshal. Overboard they must go.

Lieutenant Ramsay looked hastily up, groaned audibly. The striking down hatch through which the guns had come was tightly dogged down, already secured for sea. No time to open that hatch or the one

bove it on the forecastle and rig the davit there to hoist out the guns. How else? Hurriedly his eyes swept round the little hold and lighted on the portholes in the armory. Good. Just above the waterline, not much splash when the guns went through. He scrambled over the cases in the passage, unlocked the door in the wire mesh bulkhead, started with a wrench to undog the ports just as Hawkins and his two old shipmates scrambled down the after ladder.

Ramsay backed out the nuts, gripped the frame, pried the gasket free and swung the lens inboard, then turned to his men.

"Out the port, boys!" He snatched a fire ax from the forward bulkhead, smashed open the first case, grabbed a rifle and pitched it through.

"One at a time, the boxes won't go through whole." He handed the ax to Hawkins and hurriedly turned to undog the second port, while Clark and Williams behind him started to push rifles out into the dark water that was rippling against the side hardly a foot below the line of portholes.

Meanwhile, in the passageway, Hawkins was swinging the ax on the next case. He faltered a bit as the cover flew off and his blade smashed through into the cooling jacket of a machine gun. Sacrilege to a fighting man to ruin good weapons that way. But it had to be done. Another blow and the case gave way; a tripod, the spare barrel and the gun stock rolled out on deck. Clark grabbed the tripod legs, Williams the



gun barrels and out they went through the port.

The second portlight swung open. Ramsay turned, seized a case of rifle ammunition, swung the heavy box over his shoulder and just managed to push it through the brass frame in the ship's side. He gritted his teeth, seized another box. Lucky the ammunition boxes were small, made so a man could handle them up to the front lines under fire. Up went the box, out the port with a muffled splash. Lucky the *Lapwing* wasn't built as a regular warship, or the lower deck ports, instead of being large for ventilation, would have been so small you could hardly get your head through; and possibly might have been built with deadlights that couldn't be opened at all, thought Ramsay, as he shoved a third box out.

No one spoke. Grimly Hawkins smashed open the cases while Williams and Clark hurled out, first the rifles, then the machine gun parts, till all were gone, and the three divers turned to help their skipper jet-tison the ammunition. Ramsay waved them off.

"Never mind this. Get those smashed cases out the port, so the tide'll wash them away, or we'll have a devil of a time explaining. I want a clean sweep here!"

Hawkins nodded, again picked up the ax and broke the débris into pieces small enough for Clark and Williams to heave out.

Ramsay pushed through another box; as it splashed overboard, he caught vaguely, through the darkness of the night, the flash of automobile head-

lights gleaming through the chinks in the long line of loading doors in the deserted pier. He held up his hand for silence and glanced hastily round. Four cases of rifle ammunition left, ten boxes of cartridges for Colt .45s. Hurriedly he pointed to the rifle ammunition boxes, then turned out the lights.

"Joe, get that stuff for the rifles out, then the rest of this rubbish. Never mind the pistol cartridges. I'll stall off those people aft as long as I can. Shake it up now, and clear out when you're through. No lights and no noise if you can help it!" He pushed his head out the port, looked aft along the black side of the ship, dimly glimpsed some figures overhead, groping in the darkness along the stringpiece of the pier, heard a hail:

"*Lapwing*, there! Turn on some lights and shove out your gangway!"

Ramsay pulled back his head, fumbled through the darkness toward the passage, paused a moment then called out softly:

"Joe, break out that coil of small stuff in the outboard corner. Lower those four cartridge boxes out the port into the water, then cut the line after they're submerged so there's no splash. And clear out if you hear anyone coming!"

"Aye, aye, skipper!"

Moving cautiously over the broken boxes still littering the passage, Ramsay felt his way to the ladder and scrambled up to his cabin. Then, turning on the light there, he swiftly wiped his perspiring

face, grabbed a pea-coat, and hurried back on deck, just as the quartermaster switched on the after cargo light, brilliantly illuminating the fantail.

Keeping as much in the shadow as possible, Ramsay, still struggling to pull on his pea-coat, faced the group on the dock across the dark strip of water.

"Sorry, men, but no more visitors for the crew are allowed aboard. We're sailing in a couple of hours."

"Maybe not," a gruff voice answered from the pier, and the foremost figure threw back his overcoat, revealing a badge. "I'm the United States Marshal, and I gotta search warrant for this ship. Shove out your gangway and be quick about it!"

Ramsay stepped to the rail, leaned far over as if to get a closer glimpse of the marshal's badge, then looked quickly along the side of the pier toward the river. None of the broken cases, floating upstream with the flood tide, were visible. Relieved, he stepped back.

"O.K., marshal, but you're making a mistake." Ramsay motioned to the quartermaster to drag out the gangplank. Without waiting for a reply, he turned inboard to help the quartermaster handle the heavy piece of two-by-twelve planking that formed the gangplank. "On the dock, there! Get this line!" He seized a coil of manila tied to the outer end of the plank and heaved it toward the group on the pier, carefully landing it so far from them that the line slipped off the stringer into the water before any one of the half dozen hands which made a wild

clutch at it could get a grip.

Cursing volubly, Ramsay hauled the wet line back over the side, coiled it down again, and handed it to the man at his side.

"Here, quartermaster, you try. But put it right in their hands or the lubbers can't hold it."

"Aye, aye, sir!" The quartermaster took the dripping coil, swung it expertly across, catching the marshal squarely in the chest with the "monkey's fist," and neatly tangling him up in the opening coils.

In the resulting confusion, Ramsay seized the gangplank, hurriedly shoved one end out over the bulwark and sang out:

"On the dock, now, here she comes! Heave smartly on your line!" and gave the plank a push which sent it so far out over the rail that it slid overboard completely before the muddled group on the pier could get strain enough on the line to drag in their end.

"What ails you birds, anyway?" shouted Ramsay, making as much noise as possible. "Heave in, heave in, or you'll lose my gangplank, and by God, if you do, you'll pay for it, search warrant or no search warrant! Hey, you men on the dock, get some beef behind the marshal, you're big enough. There, that's better, another heave and she's up." He paused, then broke in suddenly: "She's foul! 'Vast heaving, you idiots, or you'll break the line!"

The heavy plank was dangling vertically down the side of the pier, its upper end caught under the

stringer, its lower end swinging violently in the rushing tide. Ramsay gazed at it, apparently much perplexed, then looked up at the marshal.

"With a couple of seamen up there, you could clear it easily, but those flatfeet with you are hopeless. Never mind the plank. Why don't you jump?"

"Jump? What do you think I am, a goat?" The burly marshal surveyed angrily the ten-foot gap of black water between the ship and the stringer. "Not on your life!" He untangled himself from the line and hurled the slack end back aboard the *Lapwing*. "Here's your line! Get your crew up on deck and get that plank across yourself!"

Ramsay caught the manila deftly as the "monkey's fist" shot by his head, hauled in the slack as the men across let go, and dropped the plank back into the water.

"Aye, aye, we'll do the best we can, marshal, but it'll take a few minutes longer if you can't help us. Our last night in New York, you know, and most of the crew's drunk. I'll try to turn out a few. Here, quartermaster, hang on to the line and don't let that plank float away till I get back." He passed the line to the man at his side, started forward up the port passageway, paused abruptly as he came amidships, and, looking back as if a new thought had struck him, sang out hoarsely:

"Sure you'd rather not jump than wait?"

A volley of curses answered him.

"All right, all right. Have it your own way, then,"

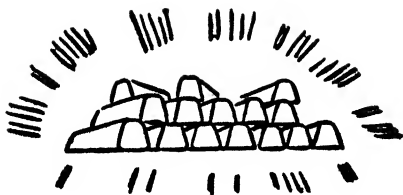
answered the skipper. "I'm only trying to help and I thought I heard you say you were in a hurry to get aboard." He disappeared inside the superstructure, ducked through the wardroom, stopped a moment to listen for the sounds of the ax, heard nothing, and was just starting forward to see how matters stood when Joe Hawkins' head popped up the ladder from the darkness of the orlop deck, and Joe emerged, followed precipitantly by Bill Clark and Tom Williams.

A look of relief spread over Joe's face as he saw Ramsay was alone.

"We heard footsteps, skipper, an' we was clearin' out four bells like you said; but all's shipshape below an' even the ports're dogged down again. Nuthin' left in the armory but half a dozen Colt automatics an' the cartridges fer 'em, an' even the banana boats carry that much. What's next?"

Lieutenant Ramsay grabbed Joe's hand, shook it, laughed out loud.

"What's next? Isn't this luck! I was just going to drag some sailors out of their bunks to rig out a gangplank and pipe a United States Marshal over the side, and here I bump into three men all dressed and ready for duty. Lay up on deck. We mustn't keep that marshal waiting!"



## CHAPTER V

"HERE's luck, on the top and on the bottom!"

Commander Carroll, U.S.N., lifted his glass and smiled across the table of the *Lapwing's* little ward-room at his former shipmate.

Ramsay clinked his glass against Carroll's, raised it high, then drank it down, looked earnestly into his former captain's eyes.

"It's mighty white of you, old man, to give me all that dope on the *Santa Cruz*. Your information's priceless, especially that about the ranges and the bearings, and you might have held it all under your hat to run another expedition on her yourself."

"Don't mention it." Carroll, his hair somewhat gray over the temples, looking much older, it seemed to Ramsay, than a few years could account for, shook his head. "She's all yours so far as I'm concerned. No more treasure hunts for me. I'm heeled, thank God. Mine's all salted away. You remember, Phil, when we waited over that last sub in a storm for a chance to dive, and the poor devils below us choked to death inside their pig? Well, I thought I'd come out of that gray haired, but I didn't. Too young then, I guess. But what that S-boat couldn't do for me, the ex-

pedition on the *Santa Cruz* certainly did. I'm through with diving, sunken gold, and all the heartaches that go with it. Me for the Navy for the rest of my life. And I'm sitting pretty now. Look!"

Obediently, Ramsay's eyes followed Commander Carroll's glance. Framed in the starboard wardroom door was a view of the docks at the Submarine Base at Coco Solo; from the nearest pier came the muffled throb of Diesel engines and a thin cloud of smoke pouring from the exhausts of a large submarine.

"The *V-11*, my boat, and the newest in the Navy," said Carroll proudly. "Everything came my way after those salvage jobs—a D.S.M. from the President, promotion to commander by special act of Congress, and then marriage to a girl that'd rate a cold four any time at a midshipmen's hop. She knows the ropes in Washington society, too, and now that the *Santa Cruz* has fixed us up so we don't have to rely on performing miracles with the Navy pay table when she wants a dinner gown or I need a new dress uniform, you can just bet that little Willie is headed for the admiral's list. Money isn't everything in the Service, but, mixed with a little brains, it helps!"

Silently Ramsay listened as he scanned the *V-11*. Not as big as some of the first V-boats, but certainly as a submarine much easier to handle. About 1500 tons he judged, somewhat bigger than the older S-boats, but not like the 3000-ton giants in the earlier V-boat series which were too unwieldy for subs and not fast enough for cruisers. A fine command, that



*V-II.* He smiled inwardly at Carroll's final comment and leaned over to refill his glass. Mixed with a little brains! If courage and intelligence meant anything in the Navy, Carroll would get there, money or no money. And no one knew that better than the men who had worked with Carroll.

Absent-mindedly, Ramsay gave the cocktail shaker another shake, filled his own glass.

"You're right, old man, the Service has a lot to commend it. Plenty of times, the last year, I wished I was back, in spite of all the bellyaching I used to do when I was in. And if I don't make out on this cruise, I'll certainly wish, when it's time for mess call to sound, that I was back looking navy beans in the face again!"

Carroll nodded sympathetically. Ramsay had been a wonder as his first lieutenant on those salvage jobs; not too much to say perhaps that his steadfastness had been the straw that swung things the right way when even to Carroll things looked hopeless, and the worn-out divers had wanted to abandon their work on the bottom.

"Anything real I can do to help out?" asked the submarine commander.

Ramsay shook his head.

"Unless you can lend me that four-inch gun on your forecastle, I'm afraid not." Ruefully he explained his defenselessness. "Nothing left but a few Colt .45s, and no money to buy any machine guns, even if we could get them down here, which we can't,

of course."

Commander Carroll whistled softly.

"Not even a Springfield rifle on board! That's bad, considering your mission. Sorry I can't help you out that way—everything in my ordnance department is on charge and it'd mean a court of inquiry if any of our guns turned up missing. You know what that means in the Service." He paused thoughtfully a moment, then brightened up. "Say, Phil, I've got something that might help in a pinch, and it's expendable, too. We've been experimenting with different kinds of small detonating charges for sinking captured merchantmen—you know, what the U-boats used to do in the late war. They're not much bigger than hand grenades; and, in repelling boarders, they'd go great. Send some of your divers over to the *V-11*; they're all old pigboat sailors and they know the ropes. I'll see that they're left alone near a case of those bombs, and after that it'll be up to them. Only, once they've got their pockets full, they'd better keep sober till they're safely back on the *Lapwing*."

"Trust an old gunner's mate or a torpedoman not to get soused when he's filled with TNT!" exclaimed Ramsay enthusiastically. "You don't know what a weight you've lifted off my mind. Only don't call your survey on that stuff too soon. Maybe when we roll through here again on our way home, loaded with bullion, I can turn them back to you."

"Perhaps, perhaps, I hope so," replied Carroll,

rising. "I'd better get back and clear the coast to those bombs." He stepped from the wardroom out on the narrow deck passage, waved to a motor dory tied up astern the *Lapwing*, then turned to face her skipper again. "When do you sail, by the way?"

Ramsay shrugged his shoulders.

"*Quien sabe?* Orders to pick up Señor Arenda in Panama tomorrow night, but I couldn't find his name on any liner passenger lists and I've seen nothing of him yet. The Lord knows how he's traveling; incog. on some banana boat, I suppose. And you can't blame him; he's afraid some spiggoty secret service hounds are trailing him with the idea that they'd better line him up against a stone wall before he starts a revolution on them."

A motor dory chugged up alongside the low bulwark on the port quarter, the bow man hooked the rail. Carroll stepped over the bulwark, leaped expertly into the stern sheets and sat down on the boat cloth.

"I'll send my boat back for your men, captain. They'll find some old shipmates and lots that are new on the *V-II*." He smiled significantly up at Ramsay, then turned to the man in the stern. "Shove off, coxswain."

"Aye, aye, sir!" The tiller went over, in went the clutch, the little motor dory slid away.

Ramsay watched as it slipped off through the hot tropical afternoon, then beckoned to two men lolling under the fantail awning.

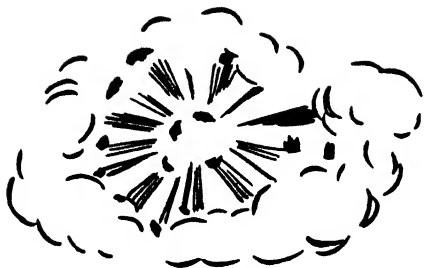
Hawkins and Martin rose from the hawser flaked down on the fantail and saluted. Ramsay scanned the dilapidated chief petty officer whites they were wearing, shook his head, ordered:

"Get your pea-coat on, Joe."

"My pea-coat? In this weather?" Joe Hawkins, wiping the perspiration off his forehead, looked up astonished. "Say, skipper what's eatin' you? Frank an' me was just wonderin' whether it'd be reg. fer us to strip down to our undershirts."

"Yes, get your pea-coats, both of you. You're going to make a liberty on the *V-II*, and you're coming back with your pockets loaded with pineapples—the Chicago kind. Listen Joe, listen Frank. You remember how you hated to pitch those machine guns out the ports? Well, you're going after something to take their place, and you'll need the biggest pockets you can muster. Now get this—"





## CHAPTER VI

COMPLETELY disgusted, Lieutenant Ramsay looked across the dark harbor waters toward the distant quays of Panama. For three nights now he had drifted as per his instructions on the outer fringe of the bay, anxiously awaiting a hail from some bum-boat that would herald his long awaited passenger. And three times, as dawn broke, he had steamed away to sea as unostentatiously as possible, trusting to the resemblance of the war colored sides of the *Lapwing* to a Navy mine sweeper to make her comings and goings unremarked along the waterfront. What had happened to Don Diego? Except for that cablegram awaiting the *Lapwing* when she entered Balboa, containing the brief instructions—and even that a week old when he received it—no word from Arenda. Judging from its point of origin, Arenda must have been in Havana when he had sent it ten days before. Ten days—easily enough time for him to have made Panama, even on a tramp.

Six bells struck. Another night nearly gone. Wearily, Ramsay gazed dismally down at the black out-

lines of the anchor winch on the forecastle; wondered what he should do. Waste weeks and perhaps months in fruitless waiting to learn perhaps some day that a surreptitious knife thrust in Havana had removed another insurrecto from South American politics? Or, before his stores were all exhausted, shove off for El Morro, to settle later with his Peruvian backer should he ever turn up alive? Something must be done soon; a few more days and he would have to grant his crew a liberty in Panama or face trouble on board with his restless seamen; and he perfectly well knew that, once his crew started to circulate in the waterfront cantinas of old Panama, there would be little secrecy left about the *Lapwing's* character. And they were much too close to the hotbed of revolutionary activities to risk further searches or possible libels. Down here it would take money to make port officials see the innocence of the *Lapwing's* mission, and money—Ramsay shrugged his shoulders. Lucky he was under no obligation even to pay the crew anything till the expedition made port again in the United States. When that time came, they would either have plenty of cash, or else—Or else? Ramsay considered that gloomily. Probably, with the expedition a failure, the *Lapwing* might be sold for enough to pay off the crew.

"Señor Ramsay!"

Startled, Ramsay jumped to the starboard side of the bridge, looked aft. Alongside in the darkness bobbed a small boat, a white figure in the stern sheets

was softly repeating his name, while amidships in the boat a ragged oarsman was struggling with a boat-hook to catch something on the bulwark to which he might cling.

"Don Diego!" Excitedly Ramsay waved to him from the rail, then hurried down the steep ladder to welcome his long-awaited owner, only to receive a severe shock when he came abreast the bumboat. Don Diego, already on deck, was awkwardly assisting a woman over the rail.

Ramsay paused in his rush to greet Arenda and choked back his wrath. What did Don Diego think this was, a midnight sailing party on an ocean liner? Instead of a welcome, an angry protest burst from his lips.

"Señor, we must sail at once! This is no time for farewells on deck. The lady must return in the boat immediately!"

Wholly disregarding the peremptory tone, the Peruvian turned as the girl he was helping leaped lightly down from the rail.

"Ah, Teniente Ramsay, it is good to see you again. And I have for you a delightful surprise, señor. My daughter, la Señorita Carlotta, she is going with us. Carlotta, may I present *el teniente* Ramsay?"

Going with us! Bowing mechanically but without even looking at the girl, Ramsay stared speechless at Don Diego. Was he crazy? A woman, and a young woman at that, tossed into the cramped quarters of a vessel like the *Lapwing*, with the hardest gang of

seamen he had ever sailed with.

"Going with us, señor!" gasped Ramsay at last. "On a voyage like this? You must be joking. Let me help Señorita Carlotta back into the boat and let's shove off."

"No, *capitán mío*, it is not a jest. My daughter has no other home left; always she goes with me now. The wardroom cabins, you remember I reserved for myself the extra one before you sailed from New York? You remember, yes? *Muy bien*, that was for my daughter. Do not worry; Carlotta is a brave girl, you will see." He turned abruptly to the rail and called to the man in the bumboat:

"Tomás, *prontísimo!*"

Two canvas bags came sailing over the bulwark. Don Diego shoved his hand into a pocket, leaned over the boat. A few silver dollars clinked as they hit the thwarts and fell into the bottom of the bumboat. "*Adios, Tomás!*"

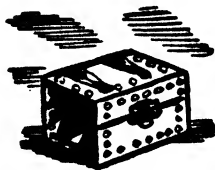
"*Gracias, señor!*" A powerful thrust with the boathook, the little boat swung from the side and in a moment was lost in the night. Too amazed to object, Ramsay dazedly saw it vanish. A woman on top of all their other difficulties on a salvage job! His face burning, he turned again to Señor Arenda.

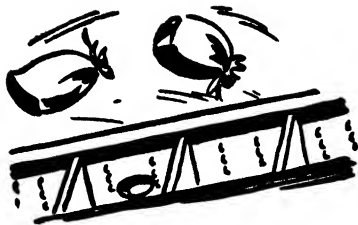
"A woman! What in blazes do you think a salvage expedition is, a yachting party?" Without waiting a reply, he swung abruptly on his heel and climbed back to the bridge. Savagely he grasped the engine telegraph, swung it to "Half ahead," then, as the



*Lapwing* slowly gained headway, curtly ordered the helmsman:

"Follow the channel buoys. We're heading for sea."





## CHAPTER VII

"WELL, Joe, I see your spiggoty side-kick put one over on the skipper. Why didn't you tip the old man off that there was a dame in the offing?" Tom Williams, his huge frame leaning back carelessly against the inside of the decompression chamber, reached over, twisted the base of the electric fan perched on top of the oxygen inhalator across the tank from him so that the breeze blew full on the dreadnaught tattooed across his broad chest, then turned his twinkling gray eyes on Joe and grinned maliciously.

"And I kin see ye ain't lost any o' yer nerve, Tom, since ye transferred into the Reserve. D'ye think ye own that fan?" Joe Hawkins leaned across the recompression tank and twisted the fan part way back. "But why blame it on me? Think I spent the few times I ever saw this Capitán Arenda in Washington chinning with him over his family affairs? I'll say we didn't. Spanish gold, not Spanish señoritas, was the only thing he ever mentioned to me!"

"Belay the arguments, it's too hot." Bill Clark gazed morosely at his shipmates from a point of vantage against the airlock door, where what little

breeze there was on the outside blew in over him. "The beans are spilled already; the skirt's aboard, an' what'll it help to go bellyachin' about her now? Besides what difference does it make to us, anyhow?"

"Difference? Bill, I thought you was seagoin'?" replied Joe scornfully. "No difference to have skirts parading round the decks! For the love o' Pete! Did you ever see a gob keepin' his eye on his job when there was a dame in the offing?"

"Well, what's that to us?" asked Bill nonchalantly. "It's the owner's funeral, not ours, if the brightwork don't get slicked up or the decks don't get swabbed down proper."

"The brightwork and the decks, huh? It's little worryin' about them I'm doin' on this bucket!" exclaimed Tom. "I'm a gunner's mate, I am, an' swabbin' decks don't bother me. But whose funeral'll it be if I'm on the bottom in a tight place an' my tender starts to let his mind wander up the deck after them skirts instead o' fishin' the lifeline an' airhose proper, an' I git a 'squeeze' maybe? Will it be the owner they'll dig outa my helmet with a spoon? I'll bet not!"

"Calm yerself, mate, calm yerself! Why go imaginin' things like that?" Bill Clark swabbed the perspiration from his rotund face, then reached over to the water bucket under the inhalator, seized the pail in his brawny arms, and swallowed a huge gulp from its dripping brim. "Boys, what're we hangin'

round inside this iron boiler for, anyway? It's bad enough to have to stay in here when we've got 'the bends' without keepin' cooped up in it when we ain't even been overboard. Let's get out on deck where there's a breeze."

"On deck with the breeze? Bill, your imagination's getting the best o' you!" Frank Martin eased his slight figure closer to Tom's. "On deck with the heat, you mean; I ain't anxious to get any closer to that tropical sun than I have to. You take the breeze on deck, Bill, if you can find any; I'm gonna stick in the lee o' this electric fan with Tom."

"Me, too," spoke up Joe. "Let the rest o' the crew have the run o' the deck; this tank here belongs to us divers, and here I stick."

"Well, you're all gluttons fer punishment then, is what I say," answered Clark. "Fer a bosun's mate to be hanging out inside a fine imitation of a Scotch boiler just ain't seagoin'. If I could find a coupla gobs in the deck force worth chinning with, I'd leave you swabs to yer tank and live out on deck like a sailorman should when he's off watch."

"Go to it Bill, whenever ye please," chipped in Tom Williams. "If yer old navy shipmates won't do any more, how about that Spig, Pablo, or maybe that Swede, Sorensen? They look to me like a coupla hard-boiled A.B.'s good enough fer any bosun's mate to associate with. Who signed them on, anyhow, or the rest o' this blasted crew, fer that matter?"

"The skipper, I s'pose," replied Clark, a little

dubiously, "though Joe here had a hand in it, I guess. A tough lot if there ever was one, showin' how little a torpedoman like Joe knows about choosin' anything 'cept torpedoes. Now if I'd been asked, that Pablo would be on his way back to jail in Barcelona where he belongs, and that surly Swede Sorensen would still be on the beach for all I care. Two seamen like them on one boat—were ye drunk, Joe, when ye had the skipper sign them on?"

"Quit ridin' me about them two," muttered Joe gruffly. "What d'ye think the skipper asked me to dig up fer this cruise, some stewards to serve tea? Like hell he did! He says to me, 'Joe, I want a crew that, if we git in a fight with hi-jackers, knows how to fight.' So I got 'em fer 'im. What d'ye think all them guns ye heaved overboard in New York was bought fer? Pablo an' Sorensen an' the rest o' the crew all matched the guns; we ain't got the guns no more but we still got that bunch o' bruisers fer a crew!"

"I'll say we have!" exclaimed Martin, "and it's sure lucky Bill here learned being a bosun's mate while they still had belaying pins left in the Navy or this gang'd been his finish long before we hit Panama. How about that, Bill?"

"D'ye think I came into the Navy with old man Noah, Frank? Ye know well enough belayin' pins went outa the Service along with muzzle loaders before I was born, or you either. But these beach combers don't worry me none; I knocked around the

gun decks on battlewagons long enough so no gob ever gets gay with me; I know how to handle 'em, belayin' pins or no belayin' pi—"

A shadow fell across the round steel door forming the airlock entrance. Bill Clark, turning in the middle of his sentence as he noticed it, stopped short and muttered:

"Fer the love o' Mike!"

Half through the opening was a silk-clad leg; doubled low over it, trying to squeeze through, were the slim shoulders of Señorita Carlotta. A sudden silence fell in the tank; involuntarily Tom Williams rose to leave, then slumped back heavily on the deck as he recollected that the airlock was the only way out.

While a look of dismay passed between Joe Hawkins and Bill Clark, Frank Martin leaped nimbly to his feet, hurried over and extended an arm to help balance the girl struggling to get through the peculiarly shaped door.

"Lemme give you a hand, señorita!" He seized her shoulders, half dragged her through the rounded opening to the inner tank and steadied her gently as she landed on her feet in the inner compartment.

"Ah, thank you, Mr.—" She paused a moment, smiled at Frank.

"Martin, señorita, Chief Torpedoman Frank Martin."

"Thank you so much, Mr. Martin." She looked round till her eye lighted on Joe Hawkins, paused a

little uncertainly. "And this must be the Mr. Hawkins whom my father has described so enthusiastically to me."

Joe got to his feet and grinned awkwardly at her.

"The same, señorita. Mighty glad to see you here."

"You hardly look it." A mischievous smile played round Señorita Arenda's dark eyes as she noted his embarrassment. "Then this must be Mr. Williams and this Mr. Clark." She nodded at each in turn. "Both my father and Lieutenant Ramsay have told me so much about all of you. And since we're in the same boat now, I just couldn't wait longer to meet you all. I'm not intruding, am I?"

The four divers, huddled near the far end of the tank, stood silent, each expecting another to answer, till Joe Hawkins at last broke the awkward pause.

"Well, ye see, señorita, ye'll have to excuse our manners. We put in all our seagoin' in the Navy, an' we ain't much used yet to ladies on the gun deck, so to speak. But make yerself comfortable." Joe shoved toward her the little stool on which he had been sitting. "It's certainly hot in here. Wouldn't ye rather go out on deck, señorita?"

"No, and please don't call me señorita all the time. Mother came from Maryland, and, while I was born in Lima, I went to school in Washington so long, while my father was attaché there, that I think I'm just as much North American now as any girl there. And after that terrible revolution at home,

I don't think we'll ever live again in Peru, so I'm afraid the señorita business is all over for me. I'm going to be Miss Arenda for the present, anyway."

"All right with us, miss," replied Tom Williams, shifting the stool somewhat. "If you're gonna anchor here, better sit in the line o' fire o' that fan or ye'll melt before ye get out. But I'd advise ye to shove off; this tank ain't no place fer a lady less'n she wants to reduce, an' anybody kin see ye don't need that."

"Thanks for the compliment, Mr. Williams." Carlotta sat down on the bench, pulled her white skirt down over her knees and glanced up at the four perspiring sailors in their undershirts who, somewhat sheepishly, were clustered near the steel door looking for a chance to ease out through it as inconspicuously as possible. "But don't let me bother you. And please sit down again. I'm not going to bite you. You don't think I came on this trip to stay cooped up in that little cubbyhole under the bridge, do you? Hardly! With all that treasure on the *Santa Cruz*, I'm dying to know how we're going to get it, and I'm just wild to know all about diving. Perhaps I can dive myself. I saw a picture of a girl in a diving suit once—some aviator, was she not? If she could dive, I'm sure I can!"

A look of positive pain crossed Tom's broad face.

"Press agent stuff, lady, press agent stuff! A publicity man thought that up to get some newsreel notices fer a bunch o' salvage experts whose salvage act was goin' sour on 'em. If she's a diver, then I'm



Lindbergh!"

A roar of laughter from his shipmates greeted this sally; when it died away, Bill Clark, his perspiring chest heaving with mirth, chimed in.

"Yeah, that little stunt was pulled while I was on the *Falcon* up in Great Salt Pond; it's sure funny what people'll do to git a little publicity fer their pet schemes. But git over it lady, git over it. There ain't no women divers in this world, 'cept in Japan; an' out there they train 'em fer it from the time they're children. There's an upside-down country fer ye, all right! The men stays home an' minds the babies, while the women goes out divin' fer pearls. Kin ye beat that?"

A look of disappointment came over Miss Arenda's features; she regarded Williams disapprovingly.

"Now that's too bad. Really, I hoped I might dive and get some thrills myself out of this trip, instead of being just a passenger."

"Don't worry, lady." Frank Martin looked at her soberly. "If I don't miss my guess, we'll get thrills we ain't looking for, and that goes fer all hands. I been on lots of diving expeditions, and it never fails. Maybe we won't get any gold, but no diving expedition ever fails to turn up lots o' thrills—too many, if ye ask me."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the excited Carlotta. "I haven't had even an imitation thrill, for,—oh, for years! Not since I went to a hop at Annapolis and fell in love with a midshipman's brass buttons—

almost!" She sighed at the recollection. "But he didn't have a cent to marry on then, so he went away to sea, and when he came back he married a girl from Chillicothe whose father was on the Senate Naval Committee, and now I suppose he'll soon be an admiral! Wasn't that romance for you?" She smiled at her auditors in mock dismay. "So now I'm off to sea myself for thrills. Your captain, Lieutenant Ramsay, he is terribly upset over it; he hardly speaks civilly to me yet. Still I think he is nice; perhaps a few days more and he will get over it. But surely, you do not mind?"

"Well, ye can't blame the skipper, lady. Salvage expeditions ain't no picnic." Joe Hawkins shook his head morosely. "I been with Lieutenant Ramsay before an' I know him well. He's one o' them old-fashioned bozos who feels a woman's place is in the home. So far as we're concerned, we ain't no experts on where a woman's place oughta be, but we was sorta brung up ourselves to think it wasn't on a ship anyway."

"Perhaps, perhaps." Carlotta smiled engagingly at him. "But when a girl has no home any more, Mr. Hawkins, aboard ship may be the only place for her, especially when her father is there. Times have changed, and girls, too."

"Maybe so." Bill Clark shrugged his shoulders. "But I don't think men've changed much, an', beggin' yer pardon fer sayin' so, women aboard ship've always started trouble. I ain't never seen it fail."

"Thanks for your kind sentiments, but don't worry in this case over me. When there's gold in sight, girls don't count with men. And that's why I came down here, to find out how we're going to get it. I asked father about it, and he doesn't know any more about diving than a rabbit, so I went looking for the divers. And now I've found you, all you talk about is how sorry you are I'm here. Is that polite, especially from sailors?"

"No, I s'pose not," said Bill, "but then acting like Lord Chesterfield ain't one o' the things they train ye for inside a gun turret nor down in the torpedo room neither. Take yer knocks, do yer duty, an' keep yer trap shut—they's the rules fer a sailorman. But maybe at that we been too free with criticism o' what ain't our business, so we'll ask yer pardon. What kin we do fer ye?"

"Lots, thank you. You might tell me what diving's all about, and why Lieutenant Ramsay was so mad when father wanted to buy that wonderful armored diving suit the man in Brooklyn offered him. And this steel tank we're in, what is it for?"

"Well yer sure askin' a mouthful at once." Bill, facing her, fingered the lanyard on his bosun's pipe, looked nervously at his inquisitor. "I'm only a bosun's mate, lady. Ask Tom Williams there, he went through the Seaman Gunner's School, an' he knows everything."

In spite of the heat, Tom's broad shoulders shivered perceptibly as Carlotta's eyes shifted inquir-

ingly to him.

"Belay the blarney, Bill, and quit passin' the buck. You know as much about divin' as anybody in this gang; more maybe, fer you always bragged you made more dives salvagin' them subs than any of us. Come across, explain it to the lady."

"Please, Mr. Clark," seconded Carlotta eagerly.

"Well, if these torpedomen don't keep hornin' in on me, all right." Clark eased himself into the breeze from the fan, leaning against the curved inner shell of the tank, and looked down skeptically at his inquisitor. "Ye're not kiddin' me, are ye? Don't ye know nothin' about divin'?"

"Not a thing!" replied Carlotta earnestly.

"Well, then it's like this." Bill paused reflectively a moment, looked at his shipmates as if for inspiration, then continued. "To git right down to facts, leavin' out all the boloney, pressure is the main trouble in divin'. Ye see, lady, the water's heavy, an' as ye go down, it begins to press against ye an' all over ye, just as if someone laid ye out crost an anvil an' started to pile weights on yer chest. The deeper ye go, the greater the pressure. Down a hundred feet, the pressure on a man equals three tons over every square foot o' his body. At two hundred feet, the pressure doubles an' becomes six tons to the square foot, an' if ye kin imagine a six ton weight layin' on just one square foot o' yer chest, an' the same all over the rest o' yer body, that what's ye gotta stand when ye're divin' deep. At thirty fath-

oms, the total load's about eighty tons all over ye. Ain't that right, Frank?" he added, looking at Martin who was sitting on the airlock sill.

"Yeah, them's the correct figures, Bill, that is, fer a little feller like me. It's more fer Tom; he's a big guy, with lots more area to him fer the sea to press on."

"Eighty tons, *por Dios!*" murmured Carlotta lapsing unconsciously into Spanish. "Why does it not crush you?"

"Well, it seems impossible, miss, but there's tricks in all trades and in this one it's mighty simple; compressed air does the trick. They pump compressed air down to ye through a hose, partly fer ye to breathe o' course, but mainly to blow ye up exactly like the inside of an automobile tire so ye got pressure enough inside yer body to balance the weight o' the sea pressin' on ye from the outside. Ye see, it's like this." The bosun's mate leaned down as if being closer might help to make things clearer. "Yer helmet's full of air under pressure a little greater'n the pressure o' the water at the depth ye're at. You breathe that air an' it inflates yer lungs at the same pressure, an' in yer lungs the pressure is communicated to yer blood, which goes all through yer body, puttin' it under pressure enough from the inside to balance the weight o' the sea on the outside; an' that's how it comes that, spite o' that tremendous weight o' the sea restin' on yer body, it don't flatten you out. Is that plain?"

Carlotta, her brows wrinkled somewhat as she strove to keep up with Clark's explanation, finally nodded slowly.

"Yes, like pumping up an automobile tire, I can see that. But doesn't it hurt terribly to be pumped up like a rubber tire?"

Bill Clark shook his head.

"Not so much as ye might think. In fact, 'cept fer stretchin' yer eardrums when ye go down or up an' the pressure's changing, you don't hardly notice it, not till ye land on the bottom in deep water. Course if yer ear passages're clogged up from a cold so's the pressure can't equalize on both sides o' the eardrums, they'll stretch an' hurt terrible, an' if yer tender keeps on lowerin' you away under them circumstances, 'Bang' goes yer eardrums an' there you are, deaf fer the rest o' yer life. The same with them sinus passages over yer eyes; if they're clogged when yer comin' up and under decreasing pressure, the air in them hollow bones expands an' can't escape. You'll think the whole top o' yer head is ready to blow off when that happens to you.

"Them's the worst effects o' the air pressure ye'll feel while yer submerged, but there's a few more that're mighty queer though they don't hurt. Fer instance, under a lotta pressure, the air gets so thick an' heavy that it don't vibrate yer vocal cords right when ye try to talk, and yer words sound all mushed up as if ye were talkin' through yer nose maybe, so's yer tender, listenin' over the telephone, has one devil

of a time tryin' to figger out what yer tryin' to say. Fer instance, when ye pass below a hundred feet, ye can't whistle no more—the air's so heavy ye can't blow it through yer lips fast enough to make a noise."

Clark paused a moment, scratched his head trying to recall other details, while Carlotta, wide-eyed, gazed up at him, a strange picture as her alert face, drinking in eagerly Bill Clark's explanations, stood out in sharp contrast to the three divers sprawled on the deck, lolling back against the steel shell, listening absent-mindedly to what was to them only the A B C of daily life.

"Oh, yes!" Clark brightened up as he suddenly recalled something else. "There's one more pressure effect ye notice on the bottom—that's an oxygen jag. Down a hundred an' fifty or two hundred feet, because the air's so compressed, ye get six times as much oxygen with each breath as ye're normally accustomed to, an' the effect o' takin' all that oxygen exhilarates yer system so's ye're likely to feel just as if ye'd had a shot o' hootch—an' actually it affects some divers so much they act as if they was intoxicated—'s matter o' fact, they are, only they're drunk on oxygen 'stead o' gin. But divers like that had better confine their divin' to sixty feet o' water or less, where the pressure ain't so bad, 'cause ye certainly need all the brains ye got left after the pressure hits you if ye're gonna do any work on the bottom an' not git all tangled up inside a wreck, I kin tell you, lady. And 'cept that yer head feels thick and

thinkin' is bad and yer mind is all muddled up, I guess that's everything that pressure does to ye on the bottom."

Bill Clark stopped and glanced from the much impressed Carlotta to his shipmates as if expecting from them a chorus of approval over his explanations. Instead Tom Williams remarked dryly:

"That's everything, Bill, that pressure does, huh? How about little things like a 'squeeze' or 'the bends'? Pressure ain't got nothing to do with them, I suppose? Or maybe to a smart diver like you they don't count fer nothing?"

Clark's naturally ruddy face grew suddenly redder.

"Oh, yes, 'the bends.' Didn't I mention that?" His flushed face broke into an embarrassed grin. "Come to think of it, though, I was leavin' that fer one o' you technical sharps to explain. I'm only a bosun's mate," he added lamely. Just then eight bells sounded forward. A look of relief passed over Clark's face and he ducked through the airlock hurriedly, calling back over his shoulder: "Excuse me, miss, I gotta muster the watch on deck. Tom'll tell you the rest." He vanished in the passage outside; in a moment the shrill note of the bosun's pipe echoed back into the chamber.

Tom watched Clark's hurried exit, then slowly pulled his two-hundred-pound frame into a sitting position.

"Saved by the bell! Well, Bill always was good



on getting out of a tight hole." He surveyed his two remaining companions. "One o' you boys want to finish the story? No? Well then, lady," he said, turning to Señorita Arenda, "I s'pose it's up to me. Ye still interested in all this dope?"

*"Absolutamente!"* exclaimed Carlotta emphatically. "Only it's much more complicated than I thought."

"Righto!" piped up Hawkins. "It took a coupla hundred years to figure out what's happening to a diver, an' we don't know it all yet by a jugful."

"I suppose not," murmured Carlotta, gazing around at the apparatus clustered around her. "This steel cylinder we're in, and all those dials—what are they for?"

"This is the recompression tank, our 'iron doctor,'" explained Tom. "It's fer 'the bends' that Bill there was going to explain if duty hadn't called."

"The what?" asked Carlotta much puzzled.

"'The bends,'" repeated Williams slowly. "Caisson disease. It's what the pressure does to you if you ain't watchful. That's the real danger in diving, and the one thing that makes deep water work so hazardous. Bill mentioned how you gotta breathe air under heavy pressure to avoid being mashed; well, that's where the trouble starts. You see, it's this way." Tom waved his hand around in a wide sweep taking in the girl on the bench, Joe and Frank still spread out on the deck. "Here we all are, breathing natural, just like we was intended to. What's happening? Well,

inside our lungs the oxygen in the air mixes with the blood, works on it, and gets breathed out again as carbon dioxide. But mixed up with the oxygen we take in there's another gas, nitrogen, forming about three-fourths of the air, and it don't do nothing but dilute the oxygen—just goes in and out of our lungs as we breathe. That's how we're all built, to live and breathe under these conditions.

"But look what happens when you go diving. The air pressure in yer lungs and on yer blood goes up to five or six times what it is here, and then the trouble starts, though you don't know it. The oxygen works on yer blood as before, only lots faster 'cause there's more of it now, and it burns all the fat outa yer tissues and thins you down after a few dives. That ain't so bad—some people might even think it's an advantage, especially them fat dames you read about who're starving themselves to death trying to look like Greta Garbo. But meanwhile that other gas in the air, nitrogen, is getting in its licks. Under all that pressure, instead o' passing out when you exhale, a lot of the nitrogen dissolves in the blood, and goes circulating around yer system all through yer veins and arteries. Well, the deeper you go and the longer you stay down, the more nitrogen yer blood and tissues soaks up on the dive. While you're on the bottom, you don't feel it, but when you start up and the water pressure on you begins to decrease, there's the very devil to pay." Tom paused, looked solemnly at Carlotta, then continued.

"You see, lady, when you come up, the pressure that's been keeping that nitrogen dissolved ain't there no more, and the gas starts to come outa solution. You seen a bottle o' champagne before the cork's been pulled?" Silently Carlotta nodded. "Well, it's a clear liquid, though it's got a gas dissolved in it under pressure, too. Then pull the cork. Pop! The pressure's all gone. What happens? The liquid starts to bubble and froth as the gas in it comes outa solution, and it keeps on bubbling fer quite a stretch after you pour it out into a glass, as more and more gas just seems to come from nowhere and floats up to the surface.

"And that's exactly what happens in the diver's blood when he comes up and the pressure on him vanishes—the air in his tissues an' his blood starts to bubble outa solution, too, and clog his veins and arteries so his heart can't keep pumping right, and it ties him up in terrible convulsions. The slang name fer it's 'the bends' 'cause it wraps you up in knots. Take it from me, lady, that ain't a pleasant sight."

"How horrible! I see now why diving is not sport. But how do you avoid this? Surely one cannot suffer so and continue to work!"

"O.K., miss, you're dead right. If I knew I was gonna have 'the bends,' all the gold in the *Santa Cruz* wouldn't get me on the bottom. It took a coupla centuries to find the answer, but we know it now. The way to dodge 'the bends' is not to come right up from the bottom when yer work's over. Instead, we come up by stages—that is, come up part way so the pres-

sure's enough less fer some o' the air to come outa yer blood, but so there's still pressure enough left to keep it in such small bubbles that it can't clog up nothing till it reaches yer lungs and escapes, and then stop at that stage till ye've worked out all the air that's released there. Then up you come to the next stage, and repeat the wait, only longer at each stage as you approach the surface and the pressure gets less, till finally ye've got rid o' most o' the air you soaked up, and it's safe to get hoisted aboard. We call that 'decompression' and it's a grand thing; the only trouble with it is that, with all the stops you make on the way up, you spend twice as long getting 'decompressed' as you put in working on the wreck; it's a terrible strain dangling like a hooked mackerel on the end of a line fer a coupla hours in the middle of the ocean, I kin tell yer." Williams paused and swabbed his sweating chin.

"I can well believe you, señor! What a strange condition!" Carlotta gazed with new respect at the unassuming men before her. "But this steel tank here, which we are in, and those strange doors, like a safe deposit vault in a bank, what have they to do with it?"

Frank looked up at Tom whose perspiring face was turned longingly toward the exit.

"Beat it, Tom, you're all talked out. I'll finish the story," he said. With a grateful nod at him, Williams slid out through the round door. Martin, hitching himself about, looked up at Carlotta.

"That Tom Williams is a wonder, miss; they don't come no better'n Tom for anything whether it's being a c.p.o., a diver, or a friend. You'll find that out for yourself before we make port again."

"Already I am sure of it, Mr. Martin. Such gray eyes! And that square chin—everywhere the girls must go wild over such a sailor!"

"If they've got to go wild, they can't do no better'n to pick on Tom. But I guess that's neither here nor there with the explanations he was serving out. Well, to finish the story, this tank you're asking about, what we call the 'iron doctor.' It really is just a small boiler drum, a steel cylinder—maybe eight feet in diameter and about twelve feet long, as you can see, built to stand two hundred pounds to the square inch pressure, and you'll notice it's divided into two parts by this dished bulkhead, so the first compartment's maybe four feet long, and the one we're in here's about twice that.

"Now," continued Frank, "the idea is that if, in spite of his 'decompression' in the water on the way up, some bubbles form in a diver's system after he's on deck, and give him a case of 'the bends,' we slam him inside this tank, close the round steel doors, and 'recompress' him again by blowing compressed air into the tank till the man's under enough pressure to squeeze the bubbles in him so small they'll circulate to his lungs and escape, or maybe force them to re-dissolve in his blood, if we can't get rid of them no other way. That gives immediate relief in most cases,

after which the pressure's released in stages just like regular 'decompression' coming up from the bottom, till all the air's blown out of the tank, and you get down to atmospheric conditions, when you can open the door and step out cured. So us divers've named this tank the 'iron doctor' 'cause it's the one quick way of putting on the pressure and treating a diver when he's all twisted up."

"Pressure, pressure," murmured Carlotta. "Almost every other word you speak is 'pressure.' What a queer thing! First on the bottom you fight the pressure which is working to kill you, then on the surface again you must take the pressure to save your life. So all the time with a diver, it is 'pressure.'"

"Righto, lady!" broke in Joe. "Pressure's the danger, and pressure's the cure, only ye gotta know when it's poison and when it's medicine or ye'll sure have a short life workin' in the water. An' that's why deep divin' ain't so popular, 'cept fer fake salvage promoters or in fiction with a lot o' imaginative dopes who don't know no more about what a diver's up against than they know about writin', and that ain't much from what I seen o' their stuff. It sure is a funny business, with a lotta fly-by-night get-rich-quick stock salesmen ringin' in the suckers on salvage schemes that makes an honest diver ashamed to admit he ever saw a divin' rig; an' with a gang o' imitation Jules Vernes feedin' the public a lotta bilgewater about divin' that turns a real diver's stomach to read it!"

Carlotta smiled at his vehement outburst, a queer smile in spite of the dazzling teeth and the sparkling eyes playing on Joe as he finished.

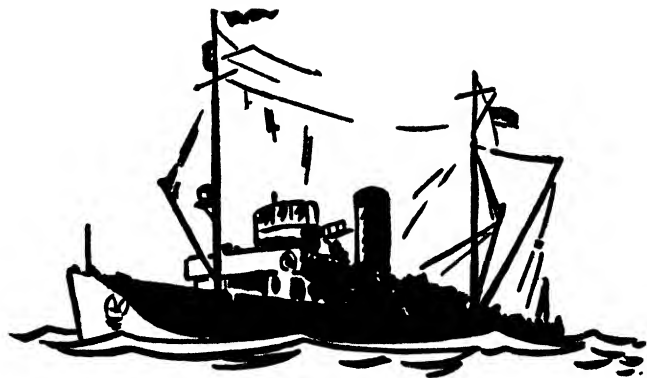
"Ah, Mr. Hawkins, from what you say, I should warn my father that he is perhaps one of the 'suckers' also. He will not like it, so?" Carlotta rose from the stool and moved toward the little door in the concave bulkhead. "Father has much money in this expedition."

Joe laughed, helped her through the constricted opening.

"Well, he'll get a run for his money on the *Santa Cruz*, miss, you kin bet yer last centavo. An' we know the stuff's there, 'cause we seen it onct an' we don't have to rely on fairy tales or legends fer its existence. An' what's more, all yer old man's money's gone into divin' rigs an' salvage gear—it ain't bein' spent fer press agents, fancy commissions to stock salesmen, nor suites at the Ritz fer the promoters, so I guess that makes this expedition unique. Rest yer mind easy—if a good salvage officer an' good divers mean anything, then Lieutenant Ramsay an' me an' my shipmates'll bring home the bacon."

Joe ducked through the door into the outer lock, helped Carlotta through the second door onto the deck beyond, then looked back at Frank Martin, alone now in the inner chamber.

"Frank, blow me if there ain't a real breeze at last here on deck. Let's stretch ourselves on the fantail till Bill pipes down fer chow!"



## CHAPTER VIII

**YAWING** slightly to the succession of billows rolling endlessly up on the port bow, the tip of her jack-staff monotonously weaving an elongated oval across the line where sea and sky met on the far horizon, the *Lapwing* plowed her way southward through the Pacific. Under a cloudless sky, the long crests swept up, burst in a cloud of phosphorescent spray against the stem and eddied back along the sides in masses of turquoise foam to join in the swirling wake astern. The throb of the engine, the creak of the booms, and the hoarse rasp of the rudder, as the wheel moved slowly from starboard to port and back again, blended in a rhythmic hum echoing continuously over the bridge.

With bare feet spread wide apart on the ash grating, bracing himself against the roll, Sorensen stood at the wheel, his huge fists completely hiding the spokes; one by one they disappeared inside his palms



as the wheel moved, a few spokes to windward, a few spokes to leeward; while Sorensen's blue eyes wandered from the lubber's mark on the wobbling compass bowl before him to the path the jackstaff was marking out against the horizon, with the easy assurance of long practice anticipating the yaw of the ship, meeting each swing before it was well started.

In the starboard wing of the bridge, bent over the chartboard, Lieutenant Ramsay pricked in the noon position, with parallel rulers set to the course from the rosette, slipped across the chart and firmly drew a pencil line southward, then stepped off along it with his dividers three hours run, thirty-six knots, pricked in another point around which he drew a small circle and against that he marked in small letters, "3 p.m."

Leaning anxiously over his shoulder, peering in at the chart, stood Don Diego, his Panama hat crushed against the weather screen in his eagerness to note the ship's progress. With a practiced eye, his glance moved along the course from the last position to the small island ahead, then to the scale at the side of the chart.

"Two hours more, *amigo mío*, and we make our landfall on El Morro," he announced briefly while Ramsay was still engaged in stepping off the remaining distance to their destination.

Ramsay nodded.

"You haven't lost your seagoing eye yet, captain; two hours run and we'll raise it from the bridge;

five minutes sooner perhaps from the crow's nest if the visibility stays as good as this. Ever see a clearer cut horizon?"

"In the North Atlantic, no; in these waters, many times have I seen it perfect. You have a good lookout, *capitán?*"

"The best there is; Frank Martin's in the crow's nest and, like most torpedomen, his eyes've been trained at sea, looking for lost torpedoes; and I can say that a man who can pick up the glint of an awash torpedo drifting a few miles off after a run can pick up anything at sea. Martin'll get that pinnacle rock on El Morro the minute we raise it over the horizon."

"*Bueno*. And then?"

"Tonight nothing more, except to break out the dragging gear and perhaps to rig the ship for mooring."

With a perfunctory nod, Don Diego left the bridge. Ramsay rose from the chartboard and swept his eye over the bridge. In the port wing, leaning far out over the wind screen, stood Carlotta, watching fascinated the play of color as the foaming water broke round the forefoot and in dazzling blue and white swept astern. For an instant, the captain's gaze rested on that windswept figure oblivious of everything except the beauty of the sea rushing past beneath her feet; then he turned to check the steering. Involuntarily he stiffened up as his eyes fell on the helmsman; Sorensen too was wholly absorbed in

the girl on the port bridge and for perhaps half a minute looked neither ahead nor at his compass.

Ramsay strode angrily to wheel.

"Watch your steering, there!"

With a start, Sorensen's face came back to the compass, the spokes started to twirl through his fingers. Ten degrees off the course. He looked sullenly into the skipper's flashing eyes, back again to the compass as the ship heeled sharply to the kick of twenty degrees right rudder, then slowly righted itself as he eased the wheel to meet her.

Standing behind the helmsman a moment conning the vessel till she steadied once more on her course, Ramsay muttered in a low voice:

"Keep your eyes in the boat! Another break like this and I'll disrate you to mess cook the rest of this cruise! Savvy that?"

Sorensen's bare toes dug themselves into the holes in the grating. Standing behind him, Ramsay watched as his shoulder muscles swelled into hard knots and the spokes seemed to bend in his huge fists. But no reply.

"Savvy that?" In a voice of steel Ramsay repeated the question.

"Ay tank so," mumbled Sorensen keeping his eyes glued to the compass.

"Mind you don't forget it, then." Ramsay sidled out from behind the wheel, looked covertly to port. Carlotta, still absorbed in the waves, was wholly unconscious of the tense interlude at the wheel. Re-

lieved, the skipper shrugged his shoulders, walked over to the starboard side of the bridge, lifted his binoculars to his eyes and slowly scanned the horizon ahead. Only tumbling waves broke the highly magnified skyline in the circle cut by his glasses as they swung across from one bow to the other. Ramsay dropped the glasses, rubbed his strained eyes, then casually looked out over the sea to starboard, and so far as he could observe through the spaces between masts and stack, to port. Nothing in sight anywhere. That was as it should be. The *Lapwing* was well off shore now, far out of the lanes of steamers bound either north or south on the South American coast. Three days out from Panama; for two days they had sighted nothing; if all went well, not another sail would they see till they were homeward bound off Panama again.

Steadily the *Lapwing* steamed on to the southward, the minutes drifted by. Eight bells.

On deck, the bosun's pipe shrilled out, Clark's hoarse voice echoed over the deck,

"Relieve the wheel an' lookout!"

A squat seaman ran up the ladder to the bridge, his bronzed arms and swarthy face in startling contrast to a flaming red jersey covering his broad chest. Ramsay caught the gleam of color and half looked round, as Pablo stopped alongside the man at the wheel, eased into his position, gripped the spokes and mumbled out the course:

"Sou-by-west!"

Sorensen nodded and released the wheel. With a toss of his head, he flung his blond locks back off his forehead, gazed a moment at Carlotta, who was watching with interest the new helmsman, then with a defiant glance at the skipper, slid down the ladder.





## CHAPTER IX

"LET go the port anchor!"

On the forecastle, a sledge swung with a bang against the pelican hook gripping the anchor chain; the anchor slid overboard and with a splash disappeared; the rattle of the cable over the wildcat and the roar of the links thundering against the hawse pipe for a moment drowned out every sound. Then the anchor hit bottom in fifteen fathoms and, with the chain slowing down, Bill Clark gradually snubbed it with the wildcat brakes till, with sixty fathoms at the water's edge, he set the brakes up hard, and the *Lapwing*, bringing up gently on her cable, started slowly to swing to the current.

Half a mile off on the starboard beam, the surf beat along the white beach of El Morro. Eagerly every eye on deck the *Lapwing* scanned the little island with its dense foliage coming down almost to the water's edge; a low-lying island only a few miles around, with its solitary distinguishing feature a sharp pinnacle rock rising perhaps a hundred feet above the sea at the northerly end and vaguely suggesting the outlines of a medieval stronghold—to the Spaniards who first glimpsed it, El Morro, the castle.

"So far, so good." Lieutenant Ramsay turned to

Don Diego, crowded in alongside him in the little wing of the bridge, offered him his glasses. "Interesting little Pacific island, for naturalists. Same flora and fauna as the Galapagos, I suppose; but for our purposes, señor, it's just a landmark." Ramsay took the cover off the starboard pelorus and dropped an azimuth circle over its rim. "Gruesome sort of a mark, though, from its history." Ramsay stooped over the pelorus stand, prepared to get a bearing on the pinnacle and cut in his anchorage on the chart.

"*Los pobrecitos, Carlotta mía!*" Don Diego handed the binoculars to his daughter, looked off to the eastward and reverently crossed himself. Sympathetically Carlotta nodded and repeated the sign of the cross. Before her mind, there flashed the vision of that scene three hundred and fifty years before when the calm seas before her had echoed to the thunder of ancient guns, when there the stricken *Santa Cruz*, laden with the year's wealth of Peru, vainly seeking the lee of El Morro as partial shelter from the broadsides of Drake and his *Golden Hind*, found herself dismasted and helpless still a league off shore. And there, with all hope of escape gone, with her guns dismounted and her crew decimated by the raking fire of the *Golden Hind* athwart her hawse, with all hope of resistance gone, with the bloodthirsty corsair bearing down closehauled to lay alongside and board, that final scene when the desperate captain of the *Santa Cruz* had flung a slow-match into his magazine and the treasure ship, with

a volcano of fire erupting amidships, had buckled and gone down, leaving the thwarted Drake nothing of his prey save a few terribly burned Spaniards whom he had fished out of the sea and carried off to hold for ransom.

Impulsively Carlotta turned from the sea to gaze across the lengthening shadow of the pinnacle on El Morro at the setting sun—the same sun, so the old Spanish record ran, which, just setting over that pinnacle, was the last sight many a dying sailor glimpsed as he went hurtling in flames from the torn *Santa Cruz* into the sea a league off El Morro.

"Yes," continued Ramsay, looking up finally from the pelorus, "a lot of blood has been spilled off this island; gold and gore always seem to go together, and anyone who believes in ghosts will find plenty, ancient and modern, roaming that island; but so far as we're concerned that needn't bother us. We won't set foot on it; El Morro there is only our point of departure for the wreck, and a fine marker it is for that."

"*Magnifico!*" agreed Don Diego. "Tomorrow you start diving, *amigo mío?*"

"Hardly." Ramsay smiled dryly. "Lots of things to do before that yet. You'll see." He walked over to the chartboard, marked out on it the anchorage position, then climbed down from the bridge and made his way aft to the fantail, where practically the whole crew off watch were gathered, excitedly discussing the nearby island. He beckoned to Hawkins,



who astride the towing bitts, was silently puffing away at his pipe. Hawkins slid down off his perch, saluted.

"Joe, Bill's still busy on the forecastle, securing the cable. Till he's done, you turn this gang to laying out a wire line ready for sweeping operations. Break out a two-hundred-fathom reel of that one-inch wire from the after hold."

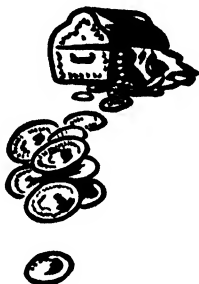
"Aye, aye, sir!" Hawkins turned briskly toward the knot of seamen. "Belay that rubbernecking! All hands on this hatch cover; come up those dogs and heave her back!"

The little quarterdeck of the *Lapwing* was soon echoing to hurrying feet. Over the after hold, the main boom was quickly rigged out, the hatch cover laid back, and a mass of material started to flow up on deck—shackles, wire, buoys, heaving lines, coils of small stuff, grappling hooks, and dozens of grate bars to weigh down the sweep.

Meanwhile, from the superstructure amidships, overboard went the two boats, first a light surfboat, with a sharp deadrise and a narrow beam, from the port chocks; then a heavily built twenty-four-foot motor-sailer with a broad beam and lumbering bows, from the starboard chocks. As it hit the water, each boat was cast loose and dropped astern, secured by a long painter.

Darkness finally settled over the Pacific, the bosun's mate piped down, the *Lapwing*, fully rigged for sweeping, heaved gently to the swell. Once more,

little knots of curious seamen gathered on the fantail and along the bulwarks in the warm tropic night, straining their eyes toward the dark blotch to the westward which was El Morro, listening to the long roll of the surf breaking on the unseen beach, speculating eagerly on the scuttle-butt rumors flying about the deck as to what wild schemes that strange collection of gear littering the decks portended.





## CHAPTER X

ONCE, twice, thrice, the sounding lead whirled in a wide circle, shot forward and splashed into the bow wave while the lead line slipped out through Sorensen's horny fingers. The chains came over the spot where the lead line vanished in the water; feverishly Sorensen heaved in the slack, plumbed the lead up and down an instant to make sure he had bottom, sang out:

"Twenty-eight fathom!"

A seaman just inboard of him in the chains started laboriously to heave in the dripping line, while Sorensen carefully coiled the slack in his left hand, ready for the next cast.

The bridge, as the *Lapwing* steamed at one-third speed to seaward from El Morro, was a scene of unusual activity. In the starboard wing, eyes glued to a navigational one-meter rangefinder, Tom Williams was slowly twirling the knob, matching the split images of El Morro, in a deep voice singing out the range, each 200 yards:

"4000 yards!"

"4200 yards!"

"4400 yards!"

In the port wing, with his pelorus sights set dead

astern, Frank Martin squinted aft at the pinnacle, monotonously droning out, "Mark, mark, mark!" while his sights stayed on the range, interspersed occasionally with a sharp "Starboard!" or "Port!" as the ship sheered to one side or the other of her line of bearing.

Behind the wheel, anxiously conning the ship as Pablo steered, Lieutenant Ramsay's eyes, fixed on the binnacle, watched as the lubber's mark hovered over the course, East  $\frac{1}{4}$  North. Those were the directions he had received at Coco Solo from Carroll—6100 yards, East  $\frac{1}{4}$  North of the pinnacle, in thirty fathoms of water, lay the remains of the *Santa Cruz*. Slowly the *Lapwing* steamed out, with her engine turning over only fast enough to maintain steerageway, while Ramsay carefully kept the ship on the proper bearing. The range steadily increased till, at 5600 yards, the skipper with a last caution to the helmsman, "Steady as you go, now!" left his position near the wheel and moved far out on the starboard wing, looking aft to the fantail where Joe hung over the bulwarks with a buoy line coiled down at his feet, anxiously watching for signals from the flying bridge.

A little outboard, the lead whirled round again and hurtled forward into the foam. A flurry of activity in the chains, then Sorensen reported:

"Thirty fathoms!"

Ramsay nodded, satisfied and turned to watch Williams at the rangefinder, while from the opposite side

of the bridge at the pelorus came the steady drone from Martin:

"Mark, mark, mark."

"That Pablo is certainly a fine seaman," murmured Ramsay to Tom. "Never saw anyone except one of these 'Metal Mike's' hold a straighter course."

His face still buried in the rubber eye guards of the rangefinder, Tom did not reply for a moment, then he lifted his head only to call out:

"6000 yards now!"

Ramsay stiffened up, leaned over the bridge rail,

"In the chains there! Belay the soundings!" then turning aft, called out to Hawkins:

"Stand by!"

Silence fell on the deck, except for Martin's continuous, "Mark, mark!" Anxiously Ramsay watched as Tom turned his adjusting knob till at last came the sharp report:

"6100!"

"Let go!" roared Ramsay.

On the fantail, Joe Hawkins pitched overboard a small anchor into the wake, paid out hurriedly the line tied to it, and, when enough slack had gone out to avoid fouling, tossed over a yellow cork buoy which bobbed wildly about in the propeller race.

For another fifty yards the *Lapwing* held on till Ramsay, sure that the buoy was well clear of the boats towing astern, rang up "Stop" on the engine telegraph, and called down to the bosun's mate waiting expectantly at the foot of the bridge ladder:

"All clear, Bill! Carry out your orders!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" Clark hurried aft along the starboard passage to the quarterdeck and beckoned several of the sailors there.

"Heave in the painter to that surfboat!" he shouted, then called into a voice tube protruding from the bulkhead near the towing winch, "Engine rooms, there! On deck the engineer for the surfboat!"

The little surfboat was dragged up under the port counter. Into it Joe Hawkins tossed four cork buoys, a coil of small stuff, and some old grate bars, then stepped over the bulwark and slid down the knotted manrope into the boat, speedily followed by Clark, by Sorensen, and then more cautiously by the engineer, whose oily dungarees left a wide smear on the fresh white paint of the boat as he slipped clumsily over the gunwale.

"O.K. Reilly. Start her up." Clark took his place in the stern sheets and grasped the tiller. Mike Reilly, his face pale from long watches in the heat and steam of the engine room and looking even paler against the weather-beaten tan of Joe Hawkins alongside him, nodded briefly and seized the starting crank. A twist, and the motor, with hardly a misfired cylinder, settled into a steady hum. Reilly looked up expectantly.

"This reminds me of them Navy engines we used to have in the motor-sailers, its so different," grinned Joe gazing up at the coxswain. "Many's the time w-

drifted in a heavy sea through the night with a busted down engine while we was workin' on them subs off Block Island, cursin' the Navy Department fer tryin' to make their own engines 'stead o' buyin' some from people who knew how. Remember them days, Bill?"

"Do I? Divin' in ice water ye could stand because there wasn't no way to heat the ocean, but to put us overboard at night in a storm runnin' hawsers with them government-built engines was askin' too much of any man. Do I remember them days? Hell, I remember one stormy night we drifted so far when the engine laid down on us that I thought we was half way to Ireland before our surfboat found us an' towed us back. These surfboat engines are different, all right; they come from the Coast Guard which wasn't too proud to buy engines 'stead o' tryin' to make 'em themselves." He listened a moment to the hum of the motor; satisfied, he gripped the tiller, looked up at the rail of the *Lapwing*.

"On deck there! Let go our painter!"

The line slacked, came flying over the rail; Sorensen deftly drew it in, coiled it down neatly and seized his boathook. One bell. Reilly pushed home the clutch. As the coxswain thrust his tiller hard down to starboard, Sorensen in the bow shoved the butt of his boathook vigorously against the steel side of the *Lapwing*. The surfboat sheered gracefully off from the *Lapwing's* stern, and in a wide sweep bobbed away toward the yellow marker dancing in the waves.

With his eyes carefully noting the east and west

line between El Morro and the buoy as his base, Bill Clark made nearly a complete turn to port and crossed the base line at right angles and just to leeward of the cork float; then, keeping on perpendicularly till, as nearly as he could judge it, he had run to the southward a hundred fathoms, he nodded to Joe Hawkins. Over splashed a couple of grate bar anchors, fifty fathoms of line, and another cork buoy.

Without stopping, Clark jammed the tiller down to port, and the little surfboat swung in a complete circle till it was headed north back over the course it had just run. Meanwhile Hawkins and Sorensen hurriedly rove off a second anchor line so that, as once again they passed to leeward of the main buoy, everything was ready. With the two buoys astern as a range, Clark ran another hundred fathoms to the north and there tossed overboard his second buoyed anchor.

Joe Hawkins shut one eye, and, leaning low over the gunwale, squinted astern at the three yellow floats. Apparently satisfied, he sat back on the after thwart and remarked to the coxswain:

"Good eye ye got, Bill. All on a line an' evenly spaced—south buoy, wreck buoy, an' north buoy. We're all set now to commence draggin'. What'd the skipper tell ye? Drag first with the grapnels, or turn to on sweepin' right away?"

"Drag first," answered Clark laconically leaning on the tiller. The boat swung to starboard and headed for the *Lapwing*, which, with headway gone,



had drifted broadside to her original course. "Not much hope of hookin' anything, he says, but worth a gamble before we sweep." He leaned harder against the tiller and headed the boat up a trifle more into the seas. "Pipe the old *Lapwing* there, Joe. Just like home agin', looking at that fantail an' them stub masts from a small boat tossin' round in the waves."

Hawkins grunted. "Like old times, right enough, Bill. Many's the underwater view of her bottom I've had in a divin' rig takin' decompression at the thirty-foot stage, wonderin' was they never gonna haul me up; an' I seen enough of her broadside, bow, an' stern workin' round her in these boats to have a bellyful of her profiles. But when we get back to Coco Solo, I'm gonna get one o' them aviators to take me over her in a bomber—I only need a bird's-eye view to complete my education."

"A bombin' plane!" Clark eyed him reproachfully. "Lay off the flyin', Joe, it ain't safe. Besides, ain't ye never stood a lookout in the crow's nest? What more d'ye want fer a bird's-eye view'n ye git from there, 'specially when she's rollin' good an' you up there in the top o' the mast flyin' from starboard to port an' back again with each roll like you was a bird yerself? Bird's-eye view! Any lubber standin' his first watch in that crow's nest, waitin' fer a wide roll to leeward so's he can feed the fishes without shootin' it down the skipper's neck on the bridge below—any of 'em, I'll tell ye, 'll admit he's gettin' a fine bird's-eye view, only he'd rather be in his bunk

instead. An' you wantin' to risk yer life in one o' them flimsy planes!"

"Anything fer a change, Bill. This goin' to sea gets monotonous. I hope this is the last cruise I ever make 'cept maybe as a passenger on one o' them de luxe liners," grumbled Joe.

"Me too!" muttered Clark, as the surfboat rounded the *Lapwing's* lee quarter, and with speed reduced maneuvered for a landing, while Bill sang out;

"On deck there! Stand by fer our painter!"

Another twist on the tiller and the boat sheered in; a jingle on the bell and Reilly shoved the gears in reverse. For a moment, the water churned astern till the boat lost headway; Sorensen flung the bow painter aboard, and, with her engine idling, the little boat heaved gently alongside, while Clark looked inquiringly up at Williams bending over the rail above.

"What's the good word, Tom?"

"The skipper says he's anchoring here for the day. 'Away both boats' is the order, and drag till he hoists recall. Stand clear below; here comes yer grappling hooks!"

Carefully Tom eased two small grapnels over the rail; Joe stowed them in the sternsheets. As Clark sheered off again, Tom called to him:

"The skipper says for your boat to drag to the south'ard o' the wreck buoy. I'll be out soon, to work the north side!"

"Aye, aye!" The surfboat shot clear and headed

back for the buoys, while in the sternsheets Hawkins and Sorensen together bent into the eye of a grapnel the end of their coil of manila.

"What ship we ban dragging for, chief?" inquired Sorensen, still engaged in seizing the loose end of his line to its standing part with a bit of marline.

Hawkins regarded him curiously. A natural question perhaps, but seemingly unnecessary.

"I thought all hands knew. Are ye runnin' me, sailor?"

Sorensen's blond locks shook vigorously.

"You tank ay yoke?" Sorensen's fingers closed on the slack end of the marline, snapped it off. "No, ay ban only trying to learn something. All over the ship, ay hear always scuttle-butt rumors, first about Cap'n Kidd while we ban in the Caribbees; then wilder yarns even that it is Morgan's treasure off Porto Bello as we near Panama; only the ship goes instead into the Pacific, so then it must be Cocos Island; but now all hands ban wrong. No one knows where he is; and instead we dig somewhere, here is this boat and the grappling irons. Ay tank it's time you tell what ship we drag for anyhow."

"No harm in yer knowin', sailor, but lots o' good the dope'll do ye. Ye ain't never heard o' her. She's an old Spanish galleon, the *Santa Cruz*, sunk off'n El Morro Island there more'n three an' a half centuries ago. She's the bucket. That mean something to ye?"

The Swede shook his head, but the chief torpedo-

man was no longer paying any attention to him. Almost dead ahead of them was the yellow float marking the assumed position of the wreck. Clark maneuvered a trifle to port to bring it in line with the pinnacle rising over the horizon three miles off, then nodded to Hawkins, and rang for slow speed.

Over went the grapnel. Hurriedly Joe paid out till a hundred fathoms were gone and then caught two turns of line round the samson post. The bight of the drag line started to straighten out as the boat forged ahead and took up the slack; in spite of the churning propeller the boat stopped as if anchored.

"Give 'er the gun, Reilly!" barked the coxswain.

Mike jerked open the throttle; the surfboat shook, the engine roared, and the wake foamed up violently. For a moment the line over the rail tautened like a bowstring, then with a jolt the grapnel broke ground and the boat moved ahead, the engine laboring heavily. Slowly they bore down on the middle buoy. The surfboat went by close aboard.

"You tank dat hulk ban here, bos'un?" asked Sorensen, watching the cork marker as it drifted by in the water.

"Somewhere close, but hookin' it's another matter." Bill Clark watched the line closely, eagerly waiting for any sign of a tautening of the bight which would show that they had hooked something. But nothing happened. The straining boat passed far beyond the buoy. Except for minor jerks as the surfboat rose and fell in the waves, the little manila drag

line continued to sweep aft in a long bight, whipping gently in and out of the water.

Back and forth the surfboat swept, each time working a few yards farther to the southward. Soon they were joined by the broad-beamed motor-sailer, which, with Tom at the tiller, started a parallel search to the northward of the wreck buoy. Only the puffing exhausts of the laboring engines now broke the silence of the sea. The boat crews, stretched out under tarpaulins rigged as temporary awnings, sought refuge from the sun beating fiercely down on them. Conversation lagged as the hours dragged along and they hooked nothing. Noon came; the boats hauled in their grapnels, returned alongside the *Lapwing*. A brief half hour for dinner; then the boats shoved off once more, to drag this time on courses at right angles to their morning's work.

A little dispirited, Don Diego leaned over the bridge rail and, through the captain's binoculars, looked on as the grappling hooks went over again and the puffing boats bounced slowly along in the waves. He turned to Lieutenant Ramsay and with rising irritation watched a few moments as the latter worked calmly over the chartboard, finishing up the smooth log of the voyage out. Finally he burst out:

"*Amigo mío*, we waste time! You know the exact spot. Why do you not send a diver down there to find the boat instead of this endless dragging?"

Ramsay shook his head and, without looking up,

answered:

"Hopeless, señor. At that depth, a diver can't see fifty feet. Unless we land him practically on the boat, he'll never find it. And merely walking round under that pressure is a hard job. No use wearing our divers out that way; we've got to locate the vessel for them first. She's there and if the boats don't hook her to-day, we'll try sweeping. Don't get impatient. If we locate her in a week, that'll be more luck than we're entitled to. But one thing I won't do—not a man goes overboard till we've made a strike. It doesn't pay in this business."

"*Muy bien.*" Señor Arenda shrugged his shoulders philosophically. "A week, you say? Why so long? Surely the sweep wire will catch her the first time!"

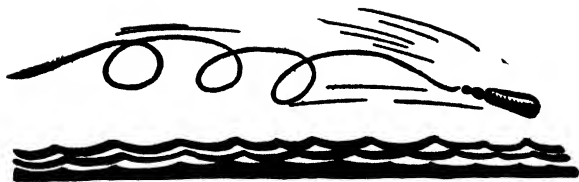
"Hardly likely. You'd be surprised how hard it is to catch a wreck. I remember the British lost a sub about twenty years ago in a small bay along the Channel and then spent a week thoroughly working every square yard of that bay over and over again with experienced mine sweepers before they finally fouled a sweep wire on her. And how do you think the sub lay, that they had so much trouble catching?"

"*Quien sabe?*" Don Diego answered, refusing to hazard a guess.

"Well, strangely enough, a perfect target for a sweep wire. She was vertical, her stern buried in the mud, her bow sticking straight up toward the surface, like the Washington Monument, and you wouldn't

think they could have missed hooking her if they tried. But somehow, they dragged over her a dozen times before a sweep finally caught. And that's the way it goes. If you don't know within a mile or two where your wreck lies, you can spend a couple of years looking for her. And if you do know, a week's really a short time. Don't worry, get yourself a book and take it easy till we make a strike." Ramsay smiled reminiscently. "I've got a good one in my cabin; used to read it myself while I was salvaging subs. Nothing like it to take your mind off the sea a while. Ever read 'Beau Geste' by any chance? No? Well, you'll find it on the shelf over my bunk below." He eased Don Diego gently toward the starboard ladder and started him off the bridge. "And we'll do our best, señor to hook the *Santa Cruz* before you finish it. Only don't read too fast!" he admonished, as Don Diego reluctantly went below.





## CHAPTER XI

SOMEWHAT dubiously, Lieutenant Ramsay eyed the trace of spray in his wake where the wire sweep, one end carried by the *Lapwing*, the other end dragged by his boats, whipped in and out of the water. For ten days the *Lapwing* and her boats had swept in every conceivable direction over the grave of the *Santa Cruz*, and not even a semblance of a strike! A dozen times, Ramsay had checked his distance and his bearing from El Morro, had verified the depth soundings. Unless the data he had obtained from Commander Carroll that day in Coco Solo was wholly wrong, they were sweeping the right spot. Everything checked, but nevertheless, regardless of which point of the compass they steered on as they dragged their wire along the bottom, it caught on nothing.

Ramsay could see distinct signs of restlessness in the crew. The heat, the enervating climate of the tropics, the endless steaming back and forth, the strain on the deck force of seeing that in their constant maneuvering they did not foul the sweep in their propeller—all were telling on the motley group of seamen he had picked up on the New York water-



front. And Don Diego was nearly impossible, from his utter impatience with sweeping to his nagging insistence that they quit dragging and explore the bottom with divers.

Along with the divers, Ramsay himself was beginning to wonder whether the wreck, together with that of the pirate vessel *El Fuego* had not at last sunk completely into the sand, leaving nothing on the ocean floor for a sweep to catch. Considering that after three hundred years submersion this had not happened when Carroll and his divers first found her, the theory looked too far-fetched. But—there had been at least two severe earthquakes along the Pacific the year before. It was common knowledge that the quakes originated along that coast beneath the sea. Perhaps the shocks and the subterranean waves accompanying them had after all engulfed their hulk? Subconsciously Ramsay considered that possibility, outwardly he struggled to ignore it.

And then there was Carlotta. Her attitude was most maddening of all. Except for one question, had the expedition wholly used up the fund which Don Diego had made available, to which Ramsay had of necessity briefly nodded in the affirmative, she had hardly spoken since the second day of their sweeping operations. Almost vindictively, the skipper looked down at her under the forecastle awning, calmly reclining in a wicker chair, reading as usual. Only when they met at the mess table did she seem to notice him at all, and then, under her cool gaze,

he had the uncomfortable feeling that her respect for his technical competence as a seaman was getting less and less.

Ramsay gazed at her a moment, swore under his breath. With men, with the crew, he could stand on his authority; with her father, he could argue, explain, reason. But in the face of that self-possessed disdain, becoming more and more evident in Carlotta, what could he do? He turned again to his endless vigil on the sweep, hopelessly watched the taut line sawing through the wake.

"Cap'n, look!"

A shout from the deck, a wild waving of arms to starboard. Ramsay twisted suddenly and looked toward his boats. No longer were they off the beam. Broad off the quarter already, they were rapidly dropping farther aft in spite of their racing engines. The sweep had caught something! He was dragging his boats backward as the wire rendered round it! Ramsay fairly leaped for the engine telegraph, rang up, "Stop," then ordered sharply:

"Hard right! Sheer over toward the boats!" Seizing a megaphone, he shouted to the distant boats:

"Head for the *Lapwing*! And even if it drags you under, keep a strain on the sweep! Don't let it slack!"

Sluggishly the *Lapwing*, all headway gone, answered her rudder and swung over toward her boats. With an anxious eye on the wire, Ramsay signaled the engine room for an occasional kick ahead, lest

the wire slack and lose their long-sought catch. As soon as the gap between him and the laboring boats narrowed enough to make conversation possible, he gripped the megaphone once more and sang out:

"Surfboat there! Cast loose your painter; let the motor-sailer hang onto the wire. Circle aft, get on the lead of that sweep from my stern, and run it out till I signal you. When I whistle, drop a buoy. And shake it up, before that wire gets a chance to come adrift!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" Clark's gruff bellow, even without a megaphone, echoed loudly across the waves to the *Lapwing*. In a trice, the surfboat had cast loose. Spinning almost on its sternpost, the little boat came about, shot around the motor-sailer, and, rounding to under the *Lapwing's* counter, headed away from her, with Clark carefully watching over his shoulder the lead of the taut sweep from the chock to where it disappeared into the water.

The motor-sailer swung in against the quarter, heaved a line aboard and was firmly secured to the midship bitts, while both ends of the wire sweep were secured to the boat. Ramsay breathed more easily, stepped over to the rangefinder. They had both ends of the sweep; now to keep a moderate strain on them till he had the strike buoyed. Hastily he figured. The sweep was 200 fathoms long, the water 30 fathoms deep. The wreck must be about 95 fathoms, 190 yards astern. He focused the rangefinder on the surfboat and motioned the helmsman

to stand by the whistle. The surfboat, moving more slowly now, was dead astern! 160—170—180. Ramsay twirled the knob, matched the images in his field. 190.

"Mark!" roared Ramsay, and the whistle shrieked out. A buoy anchor shot overboard from the surfboat; a moment later the buoy followed it.

From then on, action on the *Lapwing* was rapid. Hurriedly, a couple of four-inch hawsers were flaked down on deck, and a two-hundred-pound kedge anchor bent to each. One by one, the surfboat carried out the anchors, well ahead of the motor-sailer and dropped them overboard, so that, when the free ends of the hawsers were snubbed taut around the motor-sailer's forward samson post, she was firmly held in a triangular moor—the sweep wires astern, and the two kedges ahead spread out one on each bow.

With this done, the *Lapwing* let go the line to the motor-sailer and, with rudder hard over, steamed slowly round in a wide circle to the buoy which Clark had dropped, where she moored with one anchor ahead and a kedge anchor astern.

On the fantail as the surfboat came alongside and Clark clambered aboard, there was feverish activity. The six-inch hawser from the kedge anchor was coming in slowly through the stern chock, a taut line dripping as it surged inboard across the quarter-deck to the after winch.

Between the line and the port rail, the deck force

was hastily guying out the boom and rigging ship for diving. Dressing benches, diving rigs, air lines, lead weights everywhere. And leaning against the bulkhead, clad only in their diving underwear, were Tom Williams and Joe Hawkins, nonchalantly puffing away at their cigarettes.

Clark, gazing swiftly round, caught sight of Lieutenant Ramsay working over the valves of the air manifold. The boatswain's mate stepped up to him.

"Say, skipper, don't I go over first?"

Ramsay shook his head.

"Sorry, Bill, but Joe gets the first dip. He started the party." Disappointment showed in Clark's eyes, but Ramsay ignored it. "Don't worry over that, Bill, you'll all get a bellyful of diving before we're through. Get that stern hawser belayed now, and then send Sorensen out to relieve Martin in the motor-sailer. I want all four of you divers here on deck before anyone goes over."

Clark nodded silently and went aft. At the winch, a few more revolutions brought the stern line sufficiently taut so that, headed into the wind as she was, the *Lapwing*, held between her bower anchor and the stern kedge, was little likely to swing so long as the wind held steady. Satisfied, Clark set up the brakes, put a preventer on the hawser, and started Sorensen out in the surfboat with orders to take charge of the motor-sailer and return Martin to the ship.

Joe sauntered over from the deckhouse, sat down

on the dressing bench and stretched out his bare legs. Tom and Bill, assisted by four seamen, started to dress him. On went the stiff diving suit. Joe shoved his feet down the legs.

"Up you come, sailor!" The two tenders, grabbing the baggy suit by the shoulders, lifted Joe bodily off the bench. Hawkins slid into the suit and sat down again, only his arms and shoulders showing now above the thick rubber collar. He held out his arms, ordering:

"Slick 'em up good, mates, and then go easy with them wrist irons."

Tom stooped. He grabbed a bar of soap from a bucket of water and liberally soaped Joe's wrists. One at a time, Joe shoved his arms down the sleeves, and, while Bill kept the tight rubber cuffs on the suit distended as best he could with a pair of wrist irons, Tom hauled and tugged at Joe's slippery wrists, working them through the rubber cuffs. After a struggle and some cursing on Joe's part, both hands came through. Tom slipped a wide rubber band past each hand and over the cuff where it gripped the wrist, giving the final watertight seal to the sleeve.

"Gimme that breastplate," growled Bill.

A tender handed it up; the bosun's mate eased the copper collar carefully down past Joe's ears and nose, and slipped its studded edge inside the thick rubber collar of the suit. By this time Tom was through with the cuffs. Together, Bill and Tom tugged and hauled while they worked the studs up

through the holes punched in the collar, fitted the outside bronze straps over the studs, and with socket wrenches screwed down the nuts, sealing the suit tightly to the breastplate.

Joe thrust out his feet and slid them into the cumbersome lead-soled shoes. Two tenders in front heaved taut the pieces of signal halyard which served for laces, while two more behind him laced up with leather thongs the backs of the baggy canvas legs of his suit to prevent the air from ballooning them out while on the bottom and perhaps floating him legs up and head down.

Once more Joe rose. With an effort, Bill lifted from the deck a hundred-pound lead belt and buckled it round Joe's waist. He slipped a pair of crossed leather straps over his shoulders, partly to carry the weight of the belt, partly to hold the breastplate and its attached helmet from lifting when buoyant. And finally, like a hostler cinching the bellyband of a saddle, he pulled a husky strap through between Joe's legs and buckled it also to the belt in front.

Hawkins, heavily weighted now, lifted himself a little, wriggled slightly to make sure he was not too tightly trussed up, then thankfully sank back on the dressing bench.

"Ready for the helmet?" announced Tom. Two tenders lightered along the combined airhose and lifeline. Bill lifted the helmet from the deck, tripped the exhaust with the chin valve inside to make sure it was functioning and tested out the air inlet valve.

Meanwhile Tom slipped over Joe's head the telephone headdress with a receiver pressed firmly over each ear. As Bill passed him the helmet, Tom jacked in the receiver cord and held the helmet close to Joe's face.

"Test out Joe's telephone!"

On the superstructure, Pablo, who was standing by the wooden box to which led the ship end of the diving telephone, started rapidly calling into his transmitter,

"Hello, Joe! Hello, hello, hello!"

On the bench Joe nodded, then, leaning over the upturned helmet, called out:

"I hear you O.K. But d'ye get me?"

"Si, si, Joe," Pablo replied.

Hawkins straightened up and looked anxiously at Lieutenant Ramsay who was now standing alongside him.

"The phone's O.K. skipper, but that Spig ain't gonna be my telephone tender, is he?"

"No, Joe, I'll man it myself."

A sigh of relief escaped from Joe.

"Thank God fer that! I got trouble enough talkin' over one o' these blasted telephones to someone who understands English without tryin' to make myself understood by no Spigs. Any orders, cap'n?"

"No, Joe, it's all up to you, this dive. Just report what you find."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Ramsay stepped back. Tom lifted up the helmet,



carefully slipped it down over Joe's head, engaged the interrupted screwjoint on the breastplate, and then, with Bill bracing Joe's shoulders to take the thrust, twisted sharply on the helmet a quarter turn, jamming it home on the gasket till the safety latch on the back dropped into place, locking it on.

Joe, sealed now inside the suit, fumbled for the air-control valve over his left breast, opened it slightly to get air, then instinctively felt his belt to make sure that his diving knife, the diver's main resource in an emergency, was where it belonged. For a moment his fingers played with the hilt, traveled over the sheath. Reassured, he let go, and struggled clumsily to his feet.

Sagging now under a load of two hundred pounds of lead and copper, a grotesque figure in his diving armor, with Tom on one side and Bill on the other to hold him erect, Joe staggered toward the rail, stepped on a small steel staging slung on a bridle from the after boom and grasped the steel bail on each side to steady himself. His dressers stepped back.

"Up stage!" sang out Ramsay.

On the superstructure, a winch revolved. The stage rose gently from the deck till it cleared the bulwark.

"Hold stage!"

The winch stopped. Clark eased away the star-board guy, the stage swung slowly out beyond the

port rail and hung poised over the sea.

"Down stage!"

Carefully the winch slacked out; the stage dropped into the sea. The rising water swept over Joe's swaying figure, engulfed his helmet. A stream of bubbles started to froth the surface.

"Hold stage!"

Lieutenant Ramsay peered over the rail. Hawkins was three feet under; his image somewhat distorted by the changing surface as the waves swept by. The captain watched him a moment testing out his valves, adjusting his buoyancy. Then Ramsay turned inboard, looked up.

"Superstructure there! Pass down that telephone set."

Pablo, crouching in the port boat skids, pulled the receiver off his head and dangled the attached transmitter over the edge of the deckhouse.

Ramsay, reaching up, gripped the transmitter in one hand then caught the receiver in the other as the swarthy seaman above him let go. Quickly adjusting the headset over his left ear, he lifted the transmitter to his lips.

"Hello, Joe! All right?"

In his receiver he heard the roar of compressed air rushing through Joe's helmet, then, mingled with the noise, Joe's voice:

"Everything O.K. Take me to the descending line."

Ramsay glanced down the deck. Joe's lifeline and airhose, closely seized together in a canvas sheath, led over the rail, where Tom Williams, assisted now by the swarthy Pablo, tended them. Tom looked inquiringly at the skipper as the latter dropped the transmitter.

"O.K., Tom."

Williams, bracing his sturdy form against the bulwark, heaved taut the diver's lines. As Joe felt the strain come on his breastplate, he stepped off the stage and dangled in the water from his lifeline. Assisted by Pablo, Williams dragged him through the water along the ship's side to the bitts, where was belayed the buoy line the surfboat had last dropped.

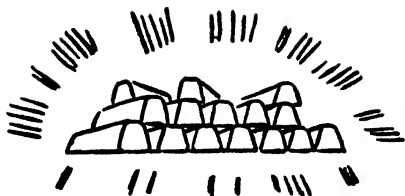
Under the surface, Joe reached out, grasped the line with one hand and wrapped his legs round it, getting a full turn round his left leg and gripping it then between his knees. Through the water, the watchers on deck caught a wave of his free hand.

"Lower away!" called Ramsay.

Tom, bracing himself against the bulwark, slacked out on the lines; another moment and Joe's figure faded from view into the ocean. Intently Lieutenant Ramsay gazed at the widening ring of bubbles, drifting farther and farther from the *Lapwing's* side as the hoses ran out and Joe sank deeper; then, turning instinctively toward the engine room hatch to listen to the throb of the air compressor on which Joe's life now depended, he bumped unexpectedly into Carlotta

standing on a coiled hawser behind him, clinging tightly to her father's arm, both gazing eagerly over his shoulder at the spot on the foaming surface marking Joe's descent.





## CHAPTER XII

WITH his helmet tilted forward, Joe Hawkins peered downward through his faceplate as he slid down the line. The sea pressed in on his legs; his canvas suit clung tightly now round his body, all the air squeezed out of it from his chest down. His breathing became more rapid as the depth increased; he swallowed frequently to clear his eardrums, pressing his nose forward occasionally against the faceplate to close off his nostrils while he swallowed. The light grew dimmer; an unearthly silence, intensified by contrast with the noise of the air rushing through his helmet, enveloped him.

Regulating his drop by the pressure of his knees on the descending line rather than by gripping the manila line with his hands, Joe slid rapidly down, watching the rope apparently taking shape from nothingness only a few feet below him and seeming to dissolve again in the water a few feet above him. A weird sensation, watching that rope—his only tangible tie with the world of men—continuously materializing below, only to fade away above against the graying background of the deep sea.

Breathing became more difficult. Joe's lungs ached

as they labored to expand against the solid water pressing in on his chest. Not enough buoyancy in his suit. Hardly slackening his speed, Joe reached round his helmet and screwed down a turn on the exhaust valve. The pressure in his suit promptly rose, the canvas swelled out over his chest and his panting lungs no longer had to force away the sea each time he inhaled.

The air grew denser. A little dizzily Joe watched the descending line, wondered, would he never hit bottom? And then vaguely he noted that the line, no longer vertical, was sloping away from him. Something brushed his side. He looked out the upper port in his helmet. There, close together he caught a brief glimpse of two wires, swaying gently in the water. The sweep!

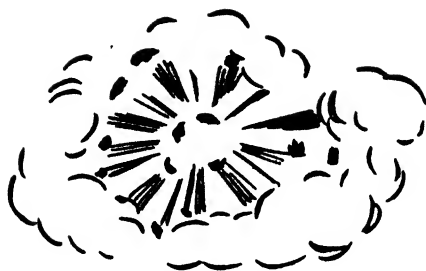
Another instant and his feet touched bottom. Hawkins let go the descending line, stepped a pace to the left to clear his hoses and looked up again for the sweep wires. Till he had them located, he dared not move about, or he might find himself, when ready to rise, with several turns of his airhose wrapped round the wires.

Faintly now he made them out, a little on his left. Good. Slowly he looked about. Nothing in sight anywhere but the dark sand of the ocean floor, and those wires scarcely visible in the semi-darkness overhead.

Carefully passing with the descending line to his right, and his own lifeline and hose dragging over his left shoulder, Joe started to follow the lead of

the sweep. The wires sagged closer to the bottom as he went slowly along, breasting through the water in a queer gait for all the world like a slow-motion picture walk, with a fine cloud of mud stirring as he lifted each huge shoe, and hanging lazily in the water behind, marking his path like dust along a country road. The sweep drooped lower. Joe reached up and touched the nearest wire, moved forward now with more confidence, counting his steps as he went. Five paces more, and the wires started to slope up again, out of his reach. And then ahead, a formless shadow loomed up in the ghostly light, rapidly taking shape as he approached. A few more paces and the long search was over. There rising steeply from the ocean floor was the rounded stern of *El Fuego*, lying upside down, with her bronze screw standing out against the rusty plates of the hull and the sweep wire precariously hooked round a propeller blade sticking out to starboard, threatening each moment to slide clear as the sweep undulated gently to the motion of the small boat in the waves far above to which the other ends were belayed.

One glance was enough. He must mark the wreck lest more days be lost in searching should the sweep come clear. Leaning against the cold hull, Joe shut off his air, and in the quiet which followed pressed his face forward toward the transmitter in his helmet, spoke a few words, then hastily turned on his air again.



## CHAPTER XIII

ON the *Lapwing*, the port rail was covered with seamen, every eye watching the slow progress of the trail of bubbles along the surface. Carefully Tom Williams fed out the diver's lines, "fishing" them constantly to make sure no undue slack went out to tangle up, nor on the other hand that he kept so taut a line as to put too much of a strain on Joe who had to work against the drag of the lines.

Anxiously Ramsay watched the steadily disappearing hoses, as coil after coil was thrown off the deck-house rack and fed out over the side. Three hundred feet out and still going overboard. He could not have been very successful in getting his marker buoy down right over the strike.

No word from Joe. Anxiously Ramsay listened, heard only the steady roar of the air through Joe's helmet. Across the water, he plotted Joe's track mentally as the bubbles moved along, coming up now broad off the bow and nearly half a ship-length away. And then the roar in his receiver ceased sharply. Involuntarily he turned inboard, then turned back



again, reassured by the steady throbbing of the *Lapwing's* air compressor. He pressed the receiver more tightly to his ear, waited expectantly. In a moment in the flat far-away tones of a man under heavy pressure came the message, the words all mushed up, except to an experienced listener, practically undistinguishable.

"On deck! I'm at the wreck! Send a line down on my airhose!"

In exultation, Ramsay sang out,

"Joe's found the wreck!"

In a flash, the tense atmosphere on deck vanished, hats of all descriptions went sailing in the air. The long days of dragging were ended, the treasure ship was located at last!

The cheering spread round the deck, echoed back from the engine room; but through the din, Tom Williams, taking no part at all, continued stolidly tending the lifelines, watching Lieutenant Ramsay for further word from Joe.

The skipper beckoned the bosun's mate and gave him the rest of Joe's message. Hurriedly Clark slipped a shackle round the hose going over the side, bent to it, with a loose bowline, the end of a two-inch line and paid out rapidly, tending his line forward of Joe's airhose to make sure the shackle slid down freely.

Ramsay called into his phone,

"Hello, Joe! The line's coming down now. Look out for the shackle!"

In the depths, Joe looked expectantly up along the smooth slope of his lines. Another moment and the brightly galvanized shackle slid into view with a manila line trailing behind it. Joe reached over his shoulder, caught the shackle just above his helmet, unscrewed the pin, and pulled the shackle off his line. Throwing away the shackle, he slipped his arm through the bowline, and then, proceeding cautiously along the ocean floor, started to survey the wreckage before him.

Bottom up, rising like a cliff from the sea floor, with the hulk of the *Santa Cruz* crushed beneath her, lay *El Fuego*. There in the dim light of the depths, protruding from the sand at his feet were the smashed timbers of the ancient poop of the Spanish galleon, vague remnants of the richly gilded carved stern still glittering in the mud. Hawkins stooped, grasped a timber, tried to lift it. No give, it was firmly embedded in the wreckage. With a grunt of satisfaction, Joe slid the line he was dragging off his arm; with a few round turns and a couple of half hitches, he made it fast. Let the sweep wires come clear now if they would. The next man down would be guided directly to the wreck.

Moving more rapidly Joe rounded the stern of the capsized pirate and searched along her other side. No signs of the *Santa Cruz* there, but the broken mast and the crushed funnel of *El Fuego* protruded from under her hull on that side; and at these obstacles Joe paused, little willing to take a

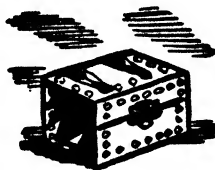
chance on fouling his lines scrambling over them. Instead he turned to retrace his steps, first seizing his lines and jerking them three times as a signal to his tender to take in slack. In a moment three answering jerks came back; not till then did Joe begin his return, carefully watching to see that his lifelines slipped clear around the smooth hull as he skirted her side.

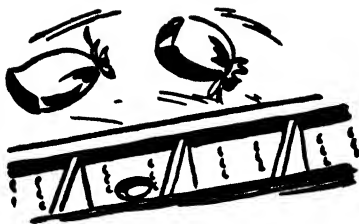
Once more around her sternpost, where the useless rudder and the motionless screw were the only objects to break the sleek continuity of the silent hull, and again he stumbled over the few remnants of the treasure ship. A little puzzled, Joe tried to figure the relative positions of *El Fuego* and the galleon beneath her. Was *El Fuego* lying athwart the *Santa Cruz*, or were they parallel? He strained his eyes, trying to establish the shape of the broken timbers at his feet, strained his memory trying to recall the position in which the *Santa Cruz* lay when last he saw her. No use, his muddled brain could not think clearly—he could figure out only that the solitary vestiges of the treasure ship were those shattered timbers lying under the capsized starboard quarter of the steel steamer.

A tug on his lines, followed in brief succession by three more, interrupted Hawkins' efforts to think. The signal to stand by to come up. Joe hesitated a moment, looking at the descending line he had just made fast. Should he go up that? No, too much of a slope from it to the other end on the *Lapwing*.

Glancing carefully up along his lifeline to see once more that it was clear, he started back along the bottom, guided by the sweep wires, toward the line he had descended. Stooping low now to minimize the resistance of his body in forcing his way through the water, looking up occasionally at the vague outlines of the wires overhead to check his direction, he plodded along the sand, an ever-widening cluster of air bubbles funneling upward from his exhaust. The descending line suddenly materialized before him with its anchor half buried in the sand at his feet. He paused, jerked four times on his airhose, gripped the gently swaying manila rope, and then opened his air control valve a little wider to lighten himself and make the lifting easier for those above.

A strain came on his breastplate, dragged him off the bottom. In short jerks, as hand over hand his tenders heaved in, he slid up the rope. Two hours later he swung clumsily in over the *Lapwing's* side.





## CHAPTER XIV

IN the little wardroom of the *Lapwing*, Joe Hawkins, clad only in his undershirt and a pair of dungaree trousers, still pale and exhausted from his exertions in the depths, faced an anxious group comprising his skipper, his shipmates, and Don Diego. Briefly he described what he had found.

"She's a mess, cap'n, take it from me. That galleon we want to work on, there ain't nothin' but a few sticks showin' clear o' that blamed *El Fuego* that was sunk tryin' to hi-jack us before. An' how any diver's gonna git into that treasure room agin stumps me."

"Easy, Joe," piped up Bill Clark. "Ye recollect them demolition bombs we packed off'n Commander Carroll's sub in Coco Solo? A coupla them alongside that pirate an' we got a neat spot blasted clear, over the galleon's poop. You'n Frank Martin're torpedo-men; handling detonators an' guncotton's right in yer line. Two dives with them charges an' the road's clear."

Ramsay shook his head.

"No TNT, boys. One shock from a bomb and the

chances are the rotten timbers of that treasure room beneath will collapse and we'll never be able to get in. You said the old wreck was mostly buried in the sand when you worked on her before. That right, Tom?"

"Yes, cap'n, there was only part of her poop showing in them days, and at that she was over on her beam ends, so we had to tunnel down and smash through a bulkhead to get into her hold. And it was tough going, take it from me!"

"Well, you've all heard the layout below," said Ramsay regarding his divers thoughtfully. "Any ideas?"

There were. Plenty. The discussion immediately became a hot argument, with suggestions coming from all hands, even Don Diego, who was strongly in favor of blasting everything away, including even the upper remnants of the galleon herself, till the gold was exposed, and then scooping the treasure out with grabs.

Ramsay listened patiently, himself keeping silent, till the squabbling died down, when he quietly squelched most of the suggestions.

"Blasting's out," he announced firmly. "Even if we could clear away the wreck above that way, we couldn't blast our way downward. Why? Because of the sand. After every charge, it would simply settle back into the hole and we'd get nowhere. No, we've got a long way to go and we'll have to preserve our passages with as little damage as possible." He

paused reflectively. "There's only one really safe way for this job—burn and dig—burn through the steel, dig through the sand. But it looks to me, from Joe's report, that even that's too much of a gamble. If we were somewhere off our own coast with a good supply base in our rear, so we could get plenty of bottled oxygen and hydrogen, the quickest thing to do would be to burn through the wreck above and clear a spot over where we have to tunnel below. But as it is, there's no telling, from the way the steamer lies, just where to start burning, and if we guess wrong, we'll use up all our gas before we get the right spot cleared. And down here, that'll mean maybe a month's delay before we could get more gas, especially the hydrogen. So I guess we'll have to go at it some other way."

The divers looked at each other soberly. Some other way. They saw only one other way—tunneling.

Tom Williams voiced their opposition.

"We're in for it then, boys. Some tunnel! Maybe clear across under that *El Fuego*! And how in blazes are we goin' to know where to start it an' what direction to dig?" He looked belligerently at the skipper. "You know mighty well, lieutenant, that tunneling's too difficult to ask anybody to go burrowing through the ocean bed less'n he knows exactly where he is an' where he's heading!"

"Keep your shirt on, Tom," replied Ramsay calmly. "There's more ways of doing this job than maybe you think. Don't you worry about extra tun-

neling. When I set you to digging it'll be from the closest place we can get to, not from any random spots outside that wreck. You don't think that, with only four divers, I'm going to start digging up the whole bottom of the ocean, do you?"

"We know you know your stuff, all right, cap'n," broke in Joe, "but if you won't let us use dynamite, and we ain't got gas enough to burn our way through that hulk, how're we gonna get to the *Santa Cruz* without a lotta washin' with them fire-hoses?"

"Easy, Joe. Simplest thing you know." Ramsay lighted a cigar, leaned back, puffed reflectively a moment. "We'll just lift the wreck of *El Fuego* off the *Santa Cruz* and then we'll have clear sailing."

"Lift *El Fuego*?" Bill Clark's blue eyes opened wide, stared incredulously at his captain. "You must be kiddin' us! Say, that wreck weighs a coupla thousand tons, which is a blame sight more'n the *Lapwing* does, an' at least twice as much as them subs we worked on."

"Yeah," chimed in Joe, echoing the idea. "A fat chance we got to lift that hulk without all them pontoons an' no help from the rest o' the salvage squadron like we had on them S-boats. An' even with the whole squadron an' four times as many divers as we got here, it took over four months' work on each o' them subs to lift her, an' neither one of 'em weighed over a thousand tons!"

Don Diego, who had been listening closely, broke in eagerly.



"*Si, señores*, but now we have that metal suit and in it the pressure will no longer bother you. With that, much more work can be done each dive, and unquestionably four men will be sufficient."

"Boloney!" burst out Martin fiercely. "You can dive in that metal suit yourself if you want to. You won't catch none of us in it!" He turned toward Ramsay more respectfully. "What's the idea, cap'n? You know we ain't rigged out for no salvage job like raisin' a ship. But if you say raise her, we know you an' you know us. There ain't a man in this divin' crew won't bust his guts raisin' her for you any way you say!" The chief torpedoman looked to his shipmates for confirmation.

"Thanks, Frank. And I know it's so," replied Ramsay puffing away unconcernedly, "But the job isn't as tough as you may think. What you've all said is true—we can't afford to spend four months or any large part of that time out here lifting *El Fuego* so as to get at the *Santa Cruz*. The treasury's empty now, and when our present supplies give out, we're through. But even if we had all the time we wanted, we haven't the lifting gear capable of raising a wreck even a tenth of *El Fuego's* size. So that's all just as you said. But don't worry—we'll make *El Fuego* lift herself clear!"

"That'll sure be fine of her!" muttered Joe. "But how're ye gonna make her do it, cap'n? Every blasted wreck I was ever shipmates with was always just that contrary ye could never know what was gonna

happen next 'cept it was exactly what you wasn't lookin' for."

"Well, this time it'll be different, boys. *El Fuego* capsized on her way down; she's keel up now as she lies on the bottom. Does that mean anything to you divers when it comes to lifting her?" Ramsay blew a cloud of smoke from his cigar, leaned back in his chair, looked expectantly across the wardroom table.

Martin, puzzled, gazed first at Tom, then, scratching his head, studied the deck in deep thought. Bill Clark looked blank, but a glimmer of understanding broke over both Tom and Joe simultaneously.

"Keel up! She's like a diving bell!" burst out Tom.

"Yeah, that's what!" cried Joe. "There she lies, with all her hatches and openings down and her watertight hull up, just like a flooded divin' bell. Blow the water outa her with compressed air, and up she comes on her own buoyancy with never a liftin' line on her!" He looked admiringly at Lieutenant Ramsay. "Ain't that simple! Just shove a few airhoses under her, an' let the *Lapwing's* compressors fill her full of air, displacing the water, while us divers spread ourselves in the sunlight up on deck."

"Not quite so easy, Joe, but that's the idea anyway," said Ramsay. "Mull it over a bit boys, and let me know then what you think."

Clark looked at him a bit shamefacedly, then muttered:

"It ain't necessary fer us to 'mull' nothin' over,

cap'n. We all know what we think already, an' that is, 'How did any dumbbells like us ever qualify fer deep-sea divers?' Ain't that so, mates?"

A ragged chorus of "Ayes!" answered him.

Ramsay rose from his chair. The discussion was over. The divers filed out.

Arenda looked inquisitively at Ramsay.

"What next, *capitán mío*? You will resume diving now?"

"Hardly," Ramsay looked after his retreating divers. "I might put a man over in fine weather like this for an inspection, but no diver can enter a wreck from a mothership held in a flimsy moor like the *Lapwing's* just now. No more diving again till we're set so a squall won't shoot us down the wind and leave an unlucky diver trapped in the wreck with his airhose broken as we swing away. Lay out the moorings; that's our first job." He stepped into the passage, beckoned Don Diego. "Come along, señor, there's lots to watch on deck before diving starts again."

He hastened aft to the fantail where, under his directions, Joe Hawkins bent three cork floats to the marker line he had secured to the wreck and tossed them overboard, while the bosun's mate and the watch on deck hauled up the now useless line down which Joe had made his descent. A brief order from the skipper and the light kedge over the stern was heaved in with the after winch till it hung just awash under the counter, where Bill Clark deftly

caught one of the flukes in a running bowline and hoisted it aboard with the boom.

Swinging now at long scope only to her bower anchor, the *Lapwing* drifted a little clear of the new buoys, and then left them completely astern as the windlass forward began to heave in the anchor cable.

From then on action was rapid. The *Lapwing* weighed anchor and steamed slowly ahead toward her motor-sailer, still hanging on, a few hundred yards away, to the no longer necessary sweep wires.

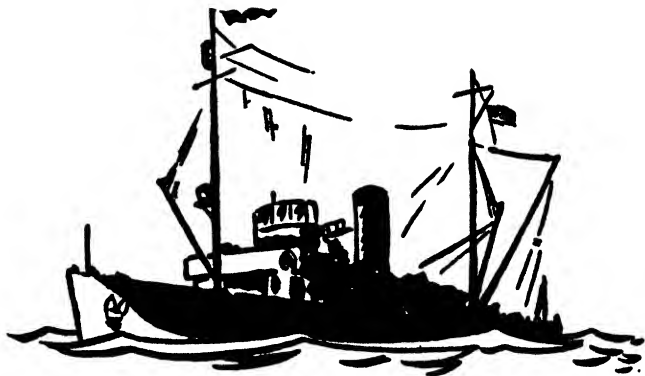
Ramsay in quick succession hauled in and stowed away the small kedges holding up the motor-sailer; then, letting the small boat keep one end of the sweep, he took the other on the *Lapwing*, and the ship and her boat gradually worked apart, each with one end of the wire, till a sudden slackening of the sweep showed it had slipped free below.

With a sigh of satisfaction, Ramsay watched, letting the *Lapwing* drift, till the sweep was completely reeled in and at last covered with a tarpaulin.

Laying out the moorings commenced in earnest. Keeping the solitary cluster of yellow floats marking the wreck as the center, the *Lapwing* steamed slowly in a circle a hundred fathoms in diameter. And each 90° on that circle, overboard went an anchor—real anchors this time—6000-pounders cautiously laid out by the main boom across the bulwark, lashed firmly inboard, and tripped by the blow of an ax to go shooting overboard, trailing a wire mooring line to which at moderate scope was secured a huge spar

buoy some two feet in diameter and ten feet long. When the *Lapwing* finished her circuit in the late afternoon there they tossed among the waves, north, south, east, and west of the wreck, standing out in vivid yellow and black paint against the gray sea, a ring of four moorings, strong enough to hold the *Lapwing* firmly in position against any wind and sea up to force 4.





## CHAPTER XV

IN the early dawn, with an easterly breeze whipping up a somewhat choppy sea, the *Lapwing*, towing her boats in tandem astern, moved quietly out from her anchorage in the lee of El Morro, and headed round the northerly end of the island. The ship began to pitch gently to the waves as she came clear of the land and the long sweep of the sea caught her; spray swept constantly across the plunging bows of the boats dragging along in her wake.

On the bridge, Ramsay anxiously scanned the clouds and the sea as the day broke. Not very promising for fair weather, but with all the time lost already in sweeping, they could not afford to let any passable day get by now.

The *Lapwing* soon left the pinnacle on El Morro Island well astern and headed for her buoys. Nosing in between the west and the south buoys and with the main engine throttled to dead slow speed, both boats

were cast adrift. The surfboat ran in past the starboard bow; without stopping, the coxswain picked up the end of a six-inch hawser dangling over the bulwark and, trailing the heavy line astern, headed into the wind for the east buoy, eased gently in toward the half-submerged spar. In the bow of the boat, Sorensen, his bare feet spread wide on the thwart to balance himself, caught the mooring shackle with his boathook. Clark jammed down his tiller, sheered in sharply, laid his boat neatly alongside the heaving buoy, and then, abandoning the tiller, seized another boathook and held the stern in while Pablo, disregarding the spray washing over him, leaned far over the gunwale and slipped a pelican hook through the steel mooring band at the free end of the buoy, slid the locking ring over the bill of the hook, and hastily shoved home the toggle pin to hold everything fast.

Drenched to the waist, Pablo drew back into the boat, turned a dripping face toward the coxswain.

"*Muy bien.*" He shook his head savagely, cleared the spray from his swarthy forehead and sank back on the thwarts alongside the engineer.

"O.K., Reilly, give her the gun." Clark dropped his boathook and grasped the thrashing tiller. As the clutch went home, Sorensen shoved the bow out viciously and the surfboat leaped clear of the heaving spar. The coxswain gave a last look to see that he was well clear of the hawser, undulating like a serpent in the waves, between the spar and the *Lapwing's*

bow. Satisfied that his screw was foul of nothing, he steered away to circle about and run down the wind to make the *Lapwing's* port side. Meanwhile, off to starboard, he watched the clumsy motor-sailer struggling in the waves to hold position alongside the south buoy while it made fast a second hawser.

Clark nudged his engineer.

"Open her up full, Mike," he laughed, watching the fruitless struggles of Martin in the stern of the other boat to hold steady alongside the bobbing spar long enough to get his pelican hook engaged. "With a little luck, we'll get those other three lines all made fast, and maybe then be in time to help secure that line fer the lads in that ice-wagon they're usin' fer a boat." He looked affectionately at his surfboat gracefully riding the waves. "Whatever else ye got agin the Coast Guard, ye gotta admit they know how to build small boats."

The surfboat swept down close aboard the port side of her mothership.

"Stand by!"

Clark waved his hand, a heaving line came hurtling over the surfboat, the "monkey's fist" splashed in the water beyond them.

"Get that, sailor!" shouted Clark.

Pablo reached up, grabbed the line shooting past him, swiftly drew in the slack, belayed the end. As the surfboat drew away, another six-inch hawser, made fast to the other end of the heaving line, surged out over the bulwark and trailed along in their wake.



Carefully quartering the seas to cut down the rolling, Clark headed for the north buoy, and, cautiously maneuvering to avoid smashing his boat, made fast the second pelican hook to the round iron bail in the mooring buoy.

Circling free, the boat crew spotted the motor-sailer, its own line also finally secured, pounding across the water for the *Lapwing's* stern.

With a grin, Clark sang out:

"Four bells, Mike! We want that last line!"

At the engine, Reilly shoved his spark to full advance and pulled the throttle wide open. Heading in as close as he dared in order to clear beneath the mooring line dangling from the high bows of the *Lapwing*, the surfboat shot across the stem of the ship, almost scraping it. In the sternsheets, Clark ducked under the bight of the swaying hawser and jammed his tiller hard to port. The surfboat spun on her tail to head down the starboard side, racing to pick up from the *Lapwing's* stern the remaining hawser.

But it was hopeless. Hanging loosely against the side, with no strain yet on it to make it stand out from the rail so they could ride under it, was the hawser the motor-sailer had just secured to the south buoy; and by the time Clark and his crew had slackened speed and lighted the line along the thwarts so as to work their boat past, Martin, on the other side of that line, had rounded to under the stern, picked up the fourth hawser himself and with a derisive

wave at the surfboat was running it out to leeward.

A little dejected at having lost out, Clark swung his boat round and tossed his painter aboard. Leaving Sorensen to act as coxswain, he clambered over the rail and waited for the skipper's directions in securing the ship.

That job was soon done. Paying out somewhat on the bow hawser, and heaving in on the stern line and the two broadside hawsers, the *Lapwing* was shortly moored with the cork buoys on the marker line bobbing in the water abreast the port quarter. And with her four lines radiating out from her like spokes from the hub to the buoys on the rim of a huge wheel, holding her firmly over the wreck, the *Lapwing* was ready for diving.





## CHAPTER XVI

"Now, Frank, the first job is to make that hull watertight, so she'll hold the air when we pump it down. You savvy that?"

Seated on the dressing bench, completely enclosed in his diving rig except for his helmet, Frank Martin nodded at his captain. Around him, listening intently were the other divers.

"Good. So far as we know, she's tight anyway, except for that hole young Porter burned in her bottom to sink her the day you people had that scrap here with the hi-jackers abroad her. From Carroll's dope, that hole's just under her port bilge, and about sixty feet from her stern. Your job's to locate that hole, and then find out everything about it, so's we'll know what to do to plug it. That clear, Frank?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

Lieutenant Ramsay stepped back, nodded to the tenders. Tom leaned over, seized Martin's shoulders, waited a moment with his sturdy frame braced to withstand the twist on Martin's breastplate, as Hawkins dropped the helmet over Frank's head and screwed the helmet round a quarter turn to lock it. Together, Tom and Joe assisted Frank's swaying figure to the stage, let go. A staccato. "Up stage!"

from Ramsay, and, to the creaking of the winch, the diver went up, outboard, and down into the water. In another moment he had tested his valves, stepped off the stage, was dragged to the descending line, and, with a final wave from beneath the surface, started down, leaving a stream of bubbles gurgling alongside as he disappeared.

Keeping himself very heavy, Frank slid rapidly downward through the sea. In little over a minute his lines slacked in the tender's hands, stopped running out; and over the diver's telephone, Ramsay, listening on deck, heard mingling with the roar of the air in Martin's helmet, the old familiar call:

"On the bottom!"

In the gloom of the ocean floor, Frank Martin swayed unsteadily, clinging to the descending line; then he lightened himself up a bit, inflating his suit somewhat to make breathing easier, and stared around, straining his eyes in an effort to make out his surroundings. Before him, loomed a dark cliff, evidently *El Fuego*. Reaching out, he could touch it. He let go the descending line and took a few steps looking for some means of climbing up the capsized hull; but while, near the bottom, there were the crushed railings and a little above that a row of portholes, some still open, above the ports, for perhaps twenty-five feet as the vessel lay bottom side up, the side rose straight and sheer through the water, with nothing to cling to except the plate edges and here and there a buttstrap studded with rivets projecting from

the smooth shell plating.

Frank looked out through the top faceplate in his helmet and considered. By lightening himself sufficiently, he could jump fifteen feet upward through the water, and if he cared to shave his negative buoyancy very close and to take a chance on becoming positively buoyant, perhaps he might jump higher and catch the bilge keel which just vaguely he could make out far above him. He shook his head. If he misjudged, and really lost all negative buoyancy, he would find himself shooting to the surface, spread eagled by the air expanding in his suit. Not worth it. The tenders on the *Lapwing* would have to haul him up the side. He glanced up again to see how his lifelines led. That wasn't right either; from his breastplate his lines trailed upward over his left shoulder, tending away from the hulk before him.

Martin hesitated a moment, tried to think. If the *Lapwing* hauled herself over more so his lines tended across the wreck, they could heave him up and land him on her bottom. Again Martin shook his head. By the time the *Lapwing* had shifted her lines, got herself hauled over, too much of his dive would be gone to permit him to do much. Mumbling aloud to himself now to make his numbing brain function, Frank looked up to gauge once again the chances of making that bilge keel in a pump. No use, thirty feet at least. His wandering eyes, sighting up through the grating over his faceplate, studied the angle of his lifelines floating in the water above, and slowly the answer to

his problem dawned on him. On the other side of *El Fuego*, everything would be right. He reached up, grasped his lines, jerked them twice, the signal for "More slack." In a moment, he felt two answering pulls, and then, keeping his left hand against the wreck, he started to walk aft along its starboard side leaving behind him the protruding timbers to which the descending line was secured.

A dozen paces, and he felt the deep shadow alongside the wreck lightening a trifle. Looking up, he noted the hull gradually sloping inward; he was approaching the stern. A few more steps and he made out the gleam of the bronze screw shining in a gap between the rudder and the dark hull.

A little anxious, Frank paused and looked up again at his lifelines. They still led up at a considerable angle, and still tended away from the ship. Relieved, he continued along the bottom parallel to the line of the hulk till he was so far beyond it that he could make it out only as a darker shadow in the dim light. Then he turned sharply to his left for fifty feet, stopped and signaled to take in slack. With that signal acknowledged, he turned another right angle to his left, and started back toward the wreck, watching eagerly till the loom of the stern, showing clearly on his left, assured him he had not become confused in his turns.

As he approached the wreck again, on its port side this time, Martin looked anxiously up along his lifelines. Would they clear the rudder and the screw?

Dimly he saw the lines sloping up, dissolving in the water above, still taut as Tom Williams on the *Lapwing* "fished" them, hauling in all the slack.

With relief, Frank saw his lines pass over the stern projections without fouling, watched them slide along just clear of the upturned keel as he continued forward. As he passed the rudder, he started counting, and when he had measured off twelve paces, he stopped again, and moved in close to the side of the wreck. With a grunt of satisfaction, he noted that now his lines led straight up the ship's side and vanished in the water, tending squarely across the vessel. He was all set. With a final look upward to make sure *El Fuego's* side there was clear of davits, steps, or mooring eyes which might foul him, he shut off his air. In the silence following, he leaned toward his transmitter and called out:

"On deck!"

Instantly came the response from Ramsay above:

"Hello, Frank!"

"There's nothing for me to climb up on down here. You'll have to haul me up the wreck. Take me up thirty feet slow! And when I sing out, stop heaving! You get me?"

"Aye, aye, Frank! Lighten yourself and stand by!"

Martin opened his air valve again, inflated his suit to relieve the strain on his lines, moved close to the black side of *El Fuego*. A strong pull came on his breastplate. In short jerks as hand over hand the tenders on the *Lapwing* heaved in, he was dragged up

*El Fuego's* side, his lead belt and the copper toes of his diving shoes beating a metallic tattoo against the rusty steel plates as he struggled to keep his canvas suit clear enough of the shell to make sure no invisible scuppers or other unexpected projections ripped it open.

The water lightened a little, he was nearing the bilge. Looking up, he saw the shell plating just above his head starting to curve away, and then as the next jerk pulled him up another yard, he was able to reach out and grasp a bilge keel standing boldly out from the steel plating, while the flat bottom of the ship came suddenly into the field of his faceplate.

"'Vast heaving!'" shouted Martin, grabbing the rolling keel with both hands. Dragging himself up over it onto the bottom of the ship, he sat down on the plates, still clinging to the bilge keel to make sure he did not slide overboard.

It was lighter there, with nothing to cast shadows in the water. Fore and aft stretched the smooth bottom of the ship, a light coat of barnacles everywhere hiding the paint and giving the ship almost a light gray color instead of the usual bright red of underwater hulls. From side to side where Martin sat, the steel bottom of the wreck was nearly flat; aft of him, he could see it sloping away on each side from the main keel, forming the run to the propeller; forward it stayed flat as far as he could see through the water.

Martin rested a moment, then, cautiously getting over on his hands and knees, he first glanced to the



left at the propeller to make sure which way was aft and commenced to crawl toward the keel. It was rough going, in spite of the apparent smoothness of the shell plates, tiny mollusks studded it everywhere, rasping his hands like a coarse file.

Four strokes of plating and he was at the keel. Noting automatically that it was much thicker than the bottom plates, Martin dragged himself across it and continued on to the far side, where once again the bilge keel, sticking out over a foot from the hull, rose before him. He paused, lifted himself a little, thrust his helmet out over the bilge. Nothing in sight—only the dark water below fading into the darker bottom.

Martin drew back, considered. He must be about midships. The hole, the skipper said, was some sixty feet from the stern, so it was aft of him. Turning slowly toward the stern, he started crawling aft, keeping just inside the bilge keel and watching carefully for the opening.

The flat bottom under him started to slope away gently, then more rapidly. A few more yards and the slope became so steep that he dared not continue farther. But there was no need. The bilge keel ended abruptly; a little aft and to his left was the propeller. He couldn't be more than thirty feet from the stern. He must have missed the hole or else been abaft it when he started his search. Cursing volubly in his helmet, he turned round, clinging to the steel fin for safety, and started crawling forward.

Step by step, he searched the plating before him as he dragged his clanking shoes along and swore at the barnacles bruising his hands. He came amidships once more, continued forward, his anxious eyes searching out of the side ports of his helmet, as well as out of his faceplate, for the opening in the hull.

Again the flat bottom began smoothly to curve down, and to narrow in toward the keel. He was approaching the bow. And then once more the bilge keel came to an end, and only the thinning bottom, fairing away steeply into the sharp forefoot, loomed in front of him.

Martin stopped; afraid to turn for fear of sliding overboard, he crawled backward till he felt himself on safer ground, and then rose unsteadily.

Bewildered he looked forward to reassure himself. Yes, there ahead was the bow, on his left hand was the bilge keel. But where was that elusive hole?

Martin shut off his air.

"On deck!"

In his ears rang out immediately,

"Hello, Frank?"

"Did you say that hole was on the port side, cap'n?"

"That's right, Frank. The port side, about sixty feet from the stern, and just under the bilge keel."

"Ye sure it's the port side?"

"Yes, the port side, Frank, the port—"

"Well, there ain't no hole then!" Martin, gasping for breath, opened his control valve. The conversa-

tion ended abruptly, as the air roared into his helmet and drowned out all other sounds.

On deck, Ramsay turned blankly to Joe Hawkins beside him. He dropped the transmitter of his diving telephone. Could Commander Carroll have been wrong?

"Joe, when you people had that battle with *El Fuego*, how did she lie?"

"Square alongside, skipper; with her port side jammed against our starboard rail an' her stern just overhangin' ours."

"Well, Frank says there's no hole on the port side."

"He must be havin' an oxygen jag down there an' can't see straight then! Sure it's in her port side! That's the only side Porter could get at when he burned that hole, an' it musta been big enough to throw an elephant through, coz that ship went down like a rock!"

Completely baffled, Ramsay pressed his receiver more tightly to his ear, listened. Interspersed with the air rumbling through Martin's helmet, he could hear a stream of profanity. Martin was talking to himself, relieving his feelings. Ramsay lifted his transmitter and shouted into it:

"Hello, Frank!"

Martin shut off his air.

"What d'ye want?"

"Have you looked all along for that hole, Frank?"

"Yes, worse luck! I've worn all the skin off'n my

hands crawling along that rolling chock from one end to the other, and all I find is barnacles!"

"You sure you're on the port side, Frank?"

"Sure I'm on the port side? Say on deck! What's eatin' you up there? D'ye think I'm a landsman, not knowing port from starboard!" Another volley of curses echoed in Ramsay's ears, then, "Here I am standing on the hull looking at the bow and the bilge keel's on my left hand. That's port in any man's navy!" And again the air swirling into Martin's helmet ended the discussion.

A gleam of understanding flashed in Ramsay's eyes, he glanced at Hawkins, shook his head sadly.

"I guess you're right, Joe. Frank's all hopped up with the pressure. He can't think straight any more." The captain waited a moment for Martin below to get his breath, then called him again.

"Hello, Frank!"

In the depths, the diver closed his control valve, the bubbles stopped exhausting from his helmet. Martin, annoyed by the constant interruption to his breathing, called out angrily:

"Hello, on deck! What d'ye want now?"

"Frank, I'm sorry, but you've searched the wrong side. *El Fuego's* upside down! She's upside down; do you get that? The left side looking forward on her is not port, it's starboard! Get over on the other—"

Breathing heavily, Martin strove to pull together his numbed wits, struggled to comprehend the mes-

sage. Capsized? Of course, he could see that, he was treading her bottom, not her deck. But what difference did that make? Wasn't her port side still to his left? He closed his eyes, his muddled wits tried to imagine where the port side went as the ship rolled over. And then slowly it dawned on him. Bottom up, port and starboard were reversed. Cursing again, he dropped on his knees, started to crawl diagonally athwartship to the other side.

And there it was. He paused abruptly as a dark circle loomed before him in the shadow of the port bilge keel—an oval hole perhaps two feet across, uneven in contour with curiously smooth edges where the flaming torch had bitten into the steel plate, burned out a panel.

Carefully Martin felt all around the edges, muttering all the while to himself.

"Good job young Porter did. No holidays in his burning." His fingers felt inside for framing. Nothing in the way there. The hole was clear of beams or longitudinal angle bars all around. No piping in the way either.

Martin cut his air a little so he could lie down, then stretched himself out on his stomach near the hole, and, with the helmet as close to the plating as he could get it, sighted across the opening fore and aft and athwartships.

"Mighty little curve to this plate," he mumbled, "no need to shape the patch." He hauled his body round, thrust his right leg across the hole till his lead

sole brought up against the far side and carefully noted where the near side came on him. "Second lacing eye above the knee," he repeated to make sure he remembered. That was the widest part. At right angles, he measured it again on his leg. "One eyelet shorter." Satisfied, he pulled himself clear of the hole, gazed round to orient himself. The descending line, which side was that on now? Painfully he strove to recollect his various movements back and forth across the ship's bottom, his wanderings around it on the sea floor. Ah, yes! It was on the starboard side, he was on the port side now.

Slowly he crawled back across the ship till the starboard bilge keel rose in his path. How to get down now? He gazed up at his lifelines. They tended away from the ship at a fair angle. If he asked the *Lapwing* to lower him, the moment they had strain enough to lift him clear, he would go swinging off through the ocean like a pendulum. Then even if nothing happened in the swing, such as the tender accidentally dropping him and giving him a "squeeze" in the drop, how would he know where to look for the descending line when they lowered him to the bottom? No use. And it was too long a walk now to get down the side he came up and walk back round the stern. Better try going aft and sliding down the rudder. That was the quickest way.

Crawling inboard till he struck the main keel, Martin turned aft, on his hands and knees as long as crawling was possible, then on his stomach as the

shell started to slope away into the counter, keeping his helmet forward toward the high side, his copper-toed shoes digging in as well as possible as he crept backward. The slope increased; involuntarily he tried to dig his fingernails into the steel plates to hold his grip. For once, he was thankful for the barnacles—the surface was so rough it kept him from slipping. A sharp rap on the back of his helmet startled him. He stopped short, twisted about. What was that? Only the propeller. With a sigh of relief, he glimpsed the bronze screw over his head, one blade close in to the shell under which he was sliding. He paused, noted that his hoses led clear on the outboard side and resumed his slide. A few more feet and his toes touched the rudder stock.

Keeping his feet against it to prevent sliding, he rolled slowly over till he could sit up, and surveyed his position. Above him rose the rudder, still hard over to starboard as it must have been when the vessel sank. And dangling from the side toward him was one of the preventer chains, evidently carried away in the wreck, which hung down the counter and vanished in the sand beyond.

Thankfully he gripped the links, climbed down the steep slope forming the fantail, and, hand over hand, dropped the last few feet vertically down the bulwark on to the bottom. And a few minutes later, tired and wet, he reached the descending line, signaled the tenders, and started on his slow rise to decompress.



## CHAPTER XVII

"How's that, skipper? Ye couldn't do better if ye had had all the supplies an' shops o' the fleet repair ship out here!"

Proudly Tom Williams surveyed his handiwork. On the *Lapwing's* deck lay the patch for the hole in *El Fuego's* bottom—an oval steel plate an inch thick with a heavy threaded stud several inches long protruding from its center and a rubber gasket four inches wide and over a quarter of an inch thick covering its outer edge.

"O.K., Tom, it's a hundred per cent," agreed Ramsay, "but where did you get all the material to make it from on this bucket?"

Williams shifted his feet uneasily.

"Wherever I could, cap'n, but I was hoping you wouldn't ask. Seein' as we ain't got no repair ship with us, I had to salvage the stuff off'n the *Lapwing* herself. I had to cut that plate outa the superstructure bulkhead between the engineroom and the fireroom; it took two pieces as a matter o' fact, so's to make the patch thick enough. That center bolt came outa the spare high pressure piston—it used to be one o' the studs to carry the follower plate. And that gasket's the rubber collars off'n a coupla diving suits—I took



the oldest ones I could find. An' there she is, all complete with an angle bar cut outa the superstructure hatch coaming fer a strongback. Pretty seagoin', I call it, an' practically all made outa the *Lapwing* herself."

"You're right, Tom, it's slick. But I'm glad you took all the steel from our topsides, so we don't take any chances of sinking ourselves just to provide patches for a wreck that's sunk already."

Ramsay slid the strongback bar over the stud, ran the retaining nut down a few turns to make sure it was not too tight a fit and looked up at Tom.

"You're sure, Tom, you've got your dimensions right now? Remember this has got to go inside the hole, so the pressure will hold it in place."

"She's O.K., skipper," Tom reassured him. "I measured it directly off'n Frank's legs. She goes like this, the short way o' the patch down through the long way o' the hole, then pull her flat, turn her 90 degrees in the hole, and she lays up snug inside, with the gasket bearing all around."

"All right, Tom, you and Frank get dressed and we'll let you put it in."

"Aye, aye, sir." Tom shuffled aft. In a moment, Bill Carr and Joe Hawkins together with half a dozen seamen surrounded Tom and Frank, dragging up belts, shoes, knives, and breastplates.

Meanwhile after plumbing the buoys on the descending line up and down to establish his position vertically, Ramsay manned the winches and, by pay-

ing out on his port hawser while he heaved in on his starboard one, hauled the *Lapwing* over some twenty yards to starboard till he was sure he had gone far enough to make the descending line lead sharply across the hull of *El Fuego*.

By the time the mooring lines were resecured, the tenders had both divers dressed up to their helmets, and were waiting for orders. Ramsay took a last pull on the descending line to satisfy himself it tended right, then stepped briskly over to the dressing benches. With their heads half hidden by the telephone headdresses, Williams and Martin looked expectantly up at him.

"Listen, Tom, listen, Frank. I've shifted the *Lapwing*, so I think, as you slide down, you'll land squarely on *El Fuego's* bottom. That'll save you climbing up. You'll go down first, Frank; you know the lay of things on her. You'll take a spare line with you; get over by that hole and make yourself heavy; Tom'll come down your line with the tools so he'll land right on the job. Then I'll lower away the patch plate down the same line and you'll get it right where you want to work. And after that it's up to you. I want a tight job, remember."

"You can trust us, cap'n." Tom looked soberly up over his copper breastplate. "We'll sock that strongback home till she's tighter'n a drum."

Ramsay stepped back and nodded to the bosun's mate.

"All right, Bill, Frank first."

On went Martin's helmet. To the groaning of the winch he was hoisted over the side and disappeared into the sea, while Joe paid out his hoses and Sorensen tended the extra manila line that Martin was taking down. Silently coil after coil slipped over the rail into the water while Ramsay pressed the telephone receiver to his ear, listening intently, wondering meanwhile how well he had judged the position of *El Fuego* below.

"On the bottom!"

Ramsay let go his receiver, looked anxiously at Joe.

"How much hose out on Frank?"

"A hundred and fifty feet at the water's edge, sir."

Martin had landed on the wreck; it took a hundred and eighty feet at least to make bottom.

"All right, Bill, get Tom ready!"

Tom Williams, his head looking ridiculously small sticking up above his breastplate, took a last puff on his cigarette, then tossed it overboard. The next moment, the copper helmet slid down over him and was twisted home by Clark. A sharp slap on the back, the signal to rise; and, with Pablo on one side and Clark on the other to help, Tom laboriously dragged himself to the stage, seized the canvas bag filled with tools that Ramsay handed him, and went overboard, sliding down the new line which Martin had just taken with him.

On deck, Ramsay watched anxiously now as two streams of bubbles foamed up in huge clusters, swell-

ing in white masses as they rose through the water like tumbling clouds against the blue sky, finally bursting in a fine mist as they broke surface. The *Lapwing* shook to the steady throb of the air compressors as the pistons labored against the pressure of the deep sea to force air down to the men far below. Bill Clark on one line, Joe Hawkins on the other, leaned across the bulwark, gently "fishing" their divers hoses, while, sprawled out on coils of hawsers littering the decks and passages everywhere, practically the entire deck force of the *Lapwing* watched, in the bubbles foaming in the waves that rolled by, the slow movements of the divers on the bottom.

Seated on the rough plates of *El Fuego's* bottom, with his back against the bilge keel and his feet dangling through the hole in her shell, his manila line wound several times round his left arm, Frank peered up through the top port in his helmet, waiting. Apathetically his eyes followed the lay of the rope twisting up through the water to where in the dim gray light it dissolved completely against the translucent background of the silent sea.

Then into his field of view slid Tom, a grotesque figure draped in lead and copper and leather straps, his canvas suit no longer ballooning out but clinging, under the pressure of the sea, as tightly to his body as another skin. He looked at least ten feet high as the water seemed to magnify his size. Swiftly he slipped down the line, leaving a thin trickle of bubbles as a wake, till, within a few feet of the bottom,

he slowed his descent, hand over hand dropped the last few fathoms, landed with a dull clatter close by Frank, and paused a moment while he adjusted his buoyancy so as not to be too heavy for easy movement.

With an effort, Martin dragged his lead-ballasted feet one by one out of the hole and stood up. Tom bent down, scanned the opening curiously, then, pointing to the bag of tools on his left arm, dropped the bag on the steel plates and rummaged in it a moment. He drew out of the bag a small steel clamp and a wrench. Motioning Frank to give him the line, he quickly threw a bowline into its end, slid the clamp through the loop, and, kneeling down, slipped the jaws of the clamp over the outer edge of the bilge keel. Still holding the clamp down with one hand, he waved to Frank, in pantomime screwing it tight. Martin nodded, picked up the wrench, and, while Tom held the clamp in place, screwed home the stud till it bit firmly into the steel fin, locking it to the keel as an anchor for their new line.

Moving cautiously away from the fin to avoid accidentally tumbling overboard, both divers straightened up; then, from force of habit, each looked upward along the line to see that all was clear—that his own airhose was neither tangled with his mate's nor fouled in the bight of the manila they had just made fast.

Satisfied, Tom seized the new line and jerked it vigorously once, the signal for "All clear." Almost

immediately an answering jerk telegraphed back from the topside, and through the noise in Tom's helmet there rang in his ears:

"Below there! Stand by for the patch!"

Williams pushed through the water to Frank's side, jammed his helmet copper to copper against Frank's and shut off his air. Martin also closed his valve. In the silence that followed, Tom spoke, his voice sounding in the dense air as if his nostrils were scaled off, his words strangely flat and indistinct as they echoed through the water from helmet to helmet.

"Frank! The patch is comin' down!"

"O.K. Tom." Martin stepped back clear and both divers, hurriedly turning on their air again, looked up along the bight of line swaying rhythmically between them to the rolling of the unseen *Lapwing* far above.

Soon it came. First just a galvanized shackle, shining in the dark water as it slipped smoothly down the manila guide line; then, held to the shackle by a few feet of lanyard, the steel patch itself hove in sight over their heads, suspended by a line from the *Lapwing's* boom. Swinging to and fro as the *Lapwing* from which it hung heaved unevenly on the surface, the heavy patch dropped jerkily down.

As it approached the bottom, Tom sighted a stray line hanging from the mass of steel. Pushing hurriedly through the water, he seized it, dragged the assembly outboard till it nearly plumbed the edge of

the hole, sang out:

"Topside, there! Slack away roundly!"

Down came the patch the rest of the way with a rush, landing just aft of the hole. Frank hastily pulled down a few more fathoms of slack on the lowering line to make sure no sudden roll of the *Lapwing* should yank the plate upward. Then he unscrewed his diving knife from its sheath, with one stroke slashed the lowering line in half, with another cut loose the lanyard to the guide shackle.

Four jerks on the severed lowering line as a signal to the topside to take it up, and Frank tossed the free end clear of the steel.

Carefully the divers scrutinized the assembly. The patch lay, stud up, on the hulk at their feet, with the strongback bar slipped temporarily down over the central stud, held in place by a few turns of marline, while the securing nut dangled by another foot of marline from a hole punched in the end of the strongback.

Silently Frank cut the lashings on the strongback, carefully set it and the securing nut down a few feet inboard of the hole, and even more carefully returned his diving knife to its sheath.

In the meantime, Tom moved his brawny frame astride the patch, dragged the two-hundred-pound mass a little closer till it half covered the hole, then, taking the remains of the lanyard seized round the stud close to the plate, he took several turns round both his wrists, to insure a good grip, and lifted the

plate just clear of *El Fuego's* bottom.

Frank Martin dropped to his knees, grasped the suspended plate, tilted it vertically, rotating it meanwhile till its narrow axis hung over the hole and slapped Tom's leg as a signal to lower. Slowly Tom bent over, the patch sank through the opening, guided gently by Frank's hands as it slid through.

And then, when nearly half through, it stuck. The lanyard came slack in Tom's hands. Crouching low before the hole, Martin twisted the plate a little first one way, then the other, trying for a narrower spot. No use. He gave that up, motioned Tom to lift a little, then slowly rotated the plate through the water, round the hole, seeking a wider diameter in the opening. Again he failed. He sighted the patch as it lay jammed down again in the hole; it did not need much—another eighth of an inch and it would go through.

Frank straightened up and saw Tom's strained eyes pressed against his faceplate staring down at the plate as he bent over it, the lanyard hanging loosely from his hands, all its weight taken for the moment by the edges of the hole in which it rested. Tom twisted his head inside his helmet, indicating vaguely the tool bag behind him. Frank nodded, slapped him to show he understood, pressed through the water to the bag and drew from it a short-handled sledge hammer.

Back at the hole, Frank gripped the sledge; in his awkward rig he measured his swing to land fairly on the upper edge of that vertical plate and drive it



through. Twice he shifted position trying to get a free swing clear of Tom's stooping helmet. Hopeless. As Tom straddled the hole, gripping the lanyard wound round his wrists, his arms and shoulders blocked the way completely.

"Tom!" Martin shut off his air, and pushed his helmet against Tom's. "Step back clear o' this hole, an' leave yer line slack a bit, so's I can hit it! But fer the love o' Mike, when it drops through, don't let go or we'll lose it!"

"O.K.!" echoed back through the water, "but be careful o' my helmet when ye swing that sledge!"

Tom stepped back, bending farther forward as he moved, in order to slack the lanyard. Precariously he struggled to balance himself at the edge of the opening, with his buoyant helmet tending to keep him upright. He was too light for that position. Slacking the lanyard a bit to get enough freedom for his hands, he grasped his control valve and throttled down on his air, then reached up to the right side of his helmet and eased a turn on the tension of his exhaust valve spring, reducing the pressure in his suit.

Immediately he felt the sea pressing in on his chest, seeming to grip him in a close-fitting form, as it squeezed the air out of the upper part of his suit. Breathing became a strain, his panting lungs fought with each breath to expand against the sea.

Looking out as he braced himself, Tom saw his partner on the opposite side of the hole, swinging

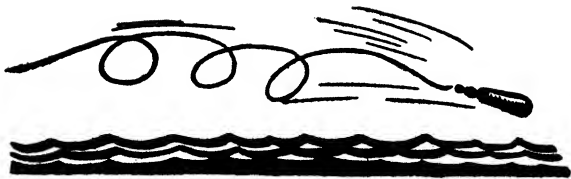
the sledge slowly upward from the plate, checking its swing. The heavy hammer rose past his faceplate, not over four inches away. Staring out now through his top port, Tom saw the sledge reach the top of its curve and pause. He glimpsed Frank's body stiffen inside his suit as it poised for the blow and watched the hammer head as it started its path through the sea, hurtling downward past his head. Exhausted by his efforts to breath, Tom closed his eyes and set his stooping shoulders for the shock.

With a dull clang, cushioned a bit by the water, the sledge smashed squarely down on the plate and drove it through the hole. Martin, watching the plate shoot from sight, dropped his sledge and shouted excitedly:

"Hooray, Tom, we got 'er!"

But his elation was short lived. To his horror he saw the lanyard, suddenly tautening as the two-hundred-pound weight took up on it, jerk Tom's teetering figure off its balance, saw his heavily weighted form plunge head first through the hole into the hulk of *El Fuego*, arms stretched out in front of him, both his wrists wound helplessly in the lanyard to the plate which was dragging him down, his leaden shoes waving an instant in the dark water as they shot through the hole.

Wildly Martin dived at Tom's legs. Too late. The canvas covered arms of his diving rig closed futilely over the black hole in the bottom of the capsized *El Fuego*!



## CHAPTER XVIII

**DAZEDLY** Frank Martin, lying flat on his stomach, thrust his helmet far into the hole, straining his eyes for a glimpse inside. Utterly hopeless. The blackness of eternal night shrouded the interior of the hulk. Only a few bubbles of air trickling upward through the water and the vanished diver's lifeline and air-hose, dangling loosely in the opening, caught his eye. Frantically he seized the lifelines, drew up a few feet of slack, jerked them once, waited feverishly. No answering pull from below. Frank let go, sat up, shut off his air, shouted into his telephone:

"Topside there!"

In agony he waited what seemed ages. No answer. Again he shouted, listened anxiously. Still no reply. In a shriek, his pounding lungs panting for air, he screamed out,

"Topside! Topside there! Fer God's sake, answer!"

No response. But gradually Frank became conscious of a thin stream of water trickling down his neck. In a flash he caught the situation. While he lay peering down that hole, the water which had leaked into his suit during the dive had run into his helmet,

soaked his transmitter, shorted the connections. His transmitter was dead!

Martin gritted his teeth. No time to waste trying to raise the topside any more. He could explain nothing to those on the *Lapwing* now, get little help from them, least of all the submarine lamp he desperately needed. Oh, for that light! With it he could safely enter the wreck, clear Tom quickly. But in the dark? Who knew what tangle of pipes, of gratings, of wreckage lay in wait for him inside that cold steel hull?

Again he seized Tom's lifeline, jerked "One" toward Tom. No answering signal. Gripping the line firmly with both hands, Frank heaved on it. It rose a few inches, grew taut, stopped. Too much for one man to lift. Tom had made himself heavy; in addition there was that two-hundred-pound weight tied to him. Speed, speed! Martin strained at the line another minute, gave up, let it slack back. He must get help.

If Tom could not signal for himself, Frank could signal for him. Grasping Tom's line, he jerked furiously toward the surface, "Four!"—the emergency signal. Almost immediately he felt on Tom's line four sharp jerks from above, then the line to the surface lost its sag, came up once more a few inches through the opening, stretched taut.

His right hand on Tom's lines, Frank stared in agony as he felt a heavy strain come on the hose and lifeline, saw the raw edge of the steel plate at the

hole bite into the canvas sheath round the lines, watched the airhose flatten out as it was drawn hard across the steel. He saw the lines stretch under a strain great enough to lift half a dozen men, in terror saw the canvas sheath round the hose start to fray, the rubber coating of Tom's airhose start to flake away against the rough steel. But even under that terrific drag on the lines from the topside, no sign of the lines in the black water below coming free. Somewhere below, Tom Williams was badly fouled. In another moment perhaps, under that strain, his airhose, his last grip on life would part; in the dark, alone in the depths, Tom would slowly strangle inside the wreck.

Before him, Frank saw Tom's lines, taut as bow-strings, stretching upward. He seized them, tried to signal on them. No go. Too taut. Involuntarily he shouted into his phone,

"Topside! Slack off! Slack off on Tom!" then dazedly recalled the situation. His phone was gone. Wildly he hurled his weighted form against the line, once, twice; watched the taut hoses vibrate under the blows. With a gasp of relief, he saw the strain ease, the lifelines slack slowly down. The tenders on the *Lapwing* had felt the signal. To make doubly sure, lest they heave again, Frank gripped the drooping lines, jerked "Two," waited for the answering "Two" from the surface, then abandoned all thought of assistance from the topside. If Tom was to be

saved, it was up to him alone. He must enter the wreck.

Grasping the descending line he had clamped to the bilge keel, he signaled on it for slack, hurriedly drew down six fathoms of line, secured the line anew, unscrewed his knife, slashed through the bight and tossed the free end down the hole till the manila came taut on the clamp. His fingers closed instinctively on his sheath, screwed his diving knife tightly home.

Gripping his own lifelines, he jerked "Two," for more slack, then, sitting down on the edge of the hole, slid his legs through, swept Tom's hoses inside his arm for a guide, seized his improvised descending line with both hands, and slipped over the rough steel edges into the opening.

Instantly even the dim light of the ocean floor vanished, total blackness enveloped him. Hand over hand, he dropped down the line. A metallic rasping came from behind. Vaguely he sensed his lead belt rubbing on both sides against some steel girders, longitudinals perhaps, forming the foundations of *El Fuego's* engines. The noise ceased, he was through that obstruction. Still he felt Tom's line stretching downward. More slowly now he continued his descent through the black water, cautiously swinging his heavy shoes out as feelers. Another fathom, his shoes struck something, slid off sideways. A steel ladder—he could feel the rungs. He swayed a moment on the line, swung his body round, still clinging, with one

arm circling Tom's hose, to the descending line, his other arm extended outward searching through the inky water. He struck a square iron column, a little oily to the touch, felt several gauges secured to it. An engine pedestal undoubtedly. Down another yard, one foot slipped off something soft. Tom? Though his head throbbed madly at the touch, Frank nevertheless dropped cautiously through the Stygian blackness, swinging both legs, searching for support. He found himself resting a foot farther down, apparently on the under side of a steel grating, with the hoses in his arm leading directly away from him. Shuffling his feet along the grating, not daring to lift them for a step lest he step off into empty space, he bumped into Tom, limp, motionless.

Swiftly Frank's hands ran over his shipmate's body, feeling out Tom's position. For an instant, cold fear gripped his stomach, numbed his brain. Tom was hanging head down, helmet on the grating at Frank's feet, arms stretched downward between the engine columns, the lanyard for the patch still encircling his wrists. In an awkward curve, Frank felt Tom's lifeless legs floating sideways, buoyed up by the air which now had inflated his laced-up legs.

Frantically Martin's fingers felt for Tom's breastplate, for the bronze eyes to which his lifelines were attached, then ran his hands along the line a yard or two. Tom's hoses were clear, not foul of anything. What then was holding him? Frank knelt. The narrow bars of the unseen engine grating on which he lay

cut into his knees, but he scarcely noted it. From Tom's breastplate, he felt along the arms hanging across the edge of the grating into the water below, gripped Tom's wrists, felt the manila lanyard cutting deeply into them.

Martin sprawled out on the grating and leaned far over. Seizing the lanyard, he attempted to draw it upward. It came an inch or two, then he heard the steel plate dangling from it clang against steel and the lanyard came instantly taut.

So that was it. Frank, his face half awash as he hung head down and the water in his suit ran into his helmet, threw his head back and spat out a mouthful of salt water. Somewhere below him in the crazy maze of upside down ladders and gratings, that oval plate was tightly jammed. No use trying to clear it. He blinked his smarting eyes in the darkness, reached awkwardly back to his sheath, unscrewed his knife, cautiously slid it downward along Tom's arms, stretched himself as far as he dared over the black abyss and reached the lanyard beyond Tom's palms.

Martin gritted his teeth and clutched the knife tightly. If that knife slipped from his grip, Tom was done for. He sensed the edge against the manila, sawed viciously across it, and felt the strands suddenly curl up round his hand. A clatter and bang echoed for an instant inside the silent hulk as the plate dropped free, but Frank, disregarding all else, twisted suddenly into a sitting position, jammed his knife back into its sheath, gave it a hasty turn to



lock it, and then swung his arms wildly upward for Tom's freed body, lest it slide into the engine wreckage and get fouled again.

Just in time. He felt Tom's helmet floating upward, his legs starting to slip off the grating on the other side. Struggling to his feet, he grasped Tom's breastplate, drew him upright, felt his arms drop limply against his thighs, sensed Tom's knees sagging under him.

Panting for breath himself, his mind numbed by long exposure to pressure, his body weakened by extraordinary exertions under over-much oxygen, Martin staggered blindly along the grating inside the silent hulk, dragging the unconscious form of his shipmate, in agony staring upward in the blackness, searching for the gleam that indicated his escape. He must get under that hole before he sought to rise, otherwise he would merely jam himself in wreckage overhead. He stumbled and nearly fell off the grating. Tom's limp form slid from his arms, collapsed in an unseen heap before him.

The exhausted diver paused. Then he tried to lift Williams up again, failed. Tom, six feet two, loaded down beside with lead and copper, was far too heavy to handle as a dead weight. He could never make it that way. Dizzily Martin considered a moment, then leaned over, felt for Tom's helmet, screwed closed a turn on his exhaust, then searched over Tom's chest for his air control valve. He opened it wide. In a moment, there came the eerie sensation of the un-

conscious diver at his feet slowly rising through the water, coming upright. Hurriedly he cramped down again on the inlet valve, seized Williams round the waist, and, gripping his lead-studded belt, continued along the grating, in mortal fear, each time some clatter told him that they had bumped a stanchion, a railing, or perhaps a ladder, that some part of their cumbersome rigs might get foul of the obstruction and hang them up helpless.

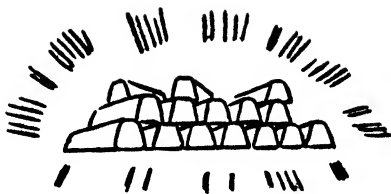
Feet on the grating, distended eyes staring upward through his faceplate, heart pounding like a triphammer, Martin shuffled along. A vague spot appeared in the water overhead, visible only by contrast with the surrounding blackness. The hole in the shell of *El Fuego*. Only big enough for one man at a time. Dizzily Frank considered. He had better go first; from the other side he could guide Tom through the opening in the wreck.

Letting Williams sag to a sitting position, he propped him against an unseen engine column, then clawed round in the water for the manila line he had dropped through. Lightening himself till he nearly floated, Frank seized the line, and hand over hand clambered up it toward that spot of light. His helmet struck the ship's bottom, he dragged his tired frame through, stood once more outside the wreck, dazzled momentarily by the dim light which to his strained eyes made the inside of his helmet seem bathed by the midday sun.

But only for a moment. Still blinking, he seized

Tom's lines, jerked the surface end three times, and, without waiting for an answer, commenced feverishly taking up the slack on the hoses. Indistinctly he caught the answering signal from the tenders, felt the lines above heave taut, start upward. With his lead weights banging the shell under him, Frank reached far into the hole and steadied the hoses. As Tom's limp form came into sight, dangling from the lines at his breastplate, Frank grabbed his helmet, jerked him upright, guided him clear of the ragged steel edges into the open water above, then signaled on Tom's lines to stop heaving. As his lines eased off, Tom Williams sank into an inert heap beside him.

Frank, stooping hurriedly, examined him. No signs of life. Tom's hands were blue and swollen; deep purple gashes showed round his wrists where the lanyard had cut into them; his arms must nearly have been torn from their sockets when the heaving tenders had sought to drag him up while he was fouled. And all the while he had been hanging head down under heavy pressure! Panting heavily, Martin struggled upright. No time for decompression, he must get Tom up immediately to save him. He gripped his own line, jerked "Four"; seized Tom's, gave the same signal. Then he grabbed Tom by the belt and clung tightly to him as his lifelines came taut on his breastplate and he felt himself dragged upward off *El Fuego*.



## CHAPTER XIX

ON the deck of the *Lapwing*, Lieutenant Ramsay, pale and silent, watched the mass of struggling tenders wildly heaving in the lines. What had happened below? Both diving telephones had gone dead—no answers from Tom, no answers from Frank, nothing but inexplicable signals in what he knew had suddenly developed into a desperate situation below. And from the wild instant when the first emergency signal had come through and they had heaved vainly on Tom's lines till stopped, with fingers tuned on their lines to catch the faintest jerk, Clark and Hawkins had waited, straining to catch each signal, carefully paying out or taking in slack as the divers below had indicated. And now in response to those last frantic emergency signals, every man on the fantail who could get a hand on the hoses was heaving hard on the lines and the dripping hoses were coming in over the bulwark a fathom on each pull.

A little sick, Ramsay looked from his watch to the sea. Down fifty minutes—Frank and Tom should have two hours decompression on the way up; instead they were coming up in two minutes. Well, it would be up to the "iron doctor" now to save them

from "the bends." He motioned to Clark, straining with half a dozen others on Martin's lifelines.

"Stand by the recompression tank, Bill! Clear both doors and get the air valves set for a ride up as soon as they're in."

The bosun's mate nodded and ran up the starboard passage. Ramsay looked overboard. The bubbles were getting closer to the side, he caught a glimpse of the end of the canvas sheath on Williams' lines sliding in over the rail. Only fifty feet out now. He must lose not an instant in getting his men aboard.

"Out stage!"

On the superstructure, Sorensen gripped his throttle and shoved it open. Carefully he ran the stage up and dropped it into the water a little abaft the struggling group of tenders, then lowered it six feet below the surface for the divers to climb on.

Tensely Ramsay waited. Five fathoms, four fathoms, three fathoms out. One more heave on the lines and he made out the divers just under the surface.

"Drag 'em to the stage!" he ordered.

Hawkins seized both lines, slipped them along the rail, took a heavy strain and waited for the divers to clamber on the little steel platform. They made no move.

Sick at heart, Ramsay glimpsed through the surface waves one man clinging weakly to the other, neither able to stretch a hand out for the bails close by. And no pressure on those men now, who brief

moments ago were laboring under six atmospheres!

Ramsay took another look at the helpless divers and sang out:

"Superstructure there! Take the stage up a foot!" Then he leaped to the rail and jumped overboard.

Two strokes and he came up splashing between the bails of the stage, floundered an instant in water up to his neck to get a footing, then reached out, grabbed the belt of the nearest diver and dragged both of them, still dangling from their lines, on to the stage.

"Up stage!"

The winch creaked, Ramsay felt a terrific load come on him as the dripping platform rose slowly from the water and the divers, losing their buoyancy, sagged against him for support. And then through the port of the helmet opposite him, he caught sight of Tom's ghastly features pressed against the glass, eyes closed, mouth hanging loosely open, a trickle of red oozing down his chin.

Wildly Ramsay twisted his head upward, shouted:

"Full speed on that winch!" Then he turned to help steady the swaying divers as the stage shot upward and swung in on deck.

For a moment there was a wild flurry as the tenders rushed in to undress the men. Through the turmoil, the captain's voice rang sharply out:

"Belay undressing 'em! Unscrew helmets, cut off their weights, and get 'em under pressure quick!"

A diving knife flashed in Hawkins' hand over the

nearest diver; a few swift strokes and lead belt, lead shoes, and leather harness, hacked free, came clattering down on deck. Joe turned to the second diver, sprawled motionless on the stage. Released of most of his weights, the first diver started to straighten up; then suddenly doubled up and toppled forward. Ramsay grabbed him by the helmet and called out hoarsely to the nearest tender:

"Brace his breastplate!" Then, with a sharp quarter turn twist, he broke the joint and lifted off the helmet.

Wan and white, his features contorted in pain, Frank Martin strove feebly to rise but sagged forward instead. A stream of water poured out of his suit over the edge of his breastplate. Martin muttered weakly:

"Give Tom a hand! He's out!" A convulsion seized him and he folded forward like a jackknife, knees drawn up nearly to his chin.

Ramsay looked at Williams whose helmet was just being stripped off. A nod to Hawkins, and, without a word, the two divers, still in their wet suits, were picked up bodily, rushed forward up the starboard passage and shoved through the outer door of the recompression tank.

Bill Clark finished setting the valves outside and dived through into the outer airlock. Ramsay, his uniform dripping wet, scrambled in after him. The round steel door slammed to. Ramsay turned down the dogs to seal the gasket, jammed them tightly

home and turned again to the inside of the airlock. On the deck lay Williams, rigid, motionless. Alongside him, contorted almost into a ball, lay Martin, struggling convulsively to unbend. Ramsay took one look, then he leaped across the prostrate men to the interior air valve and opened it wide. Compressed air came whistling through into the tank. The needle on the caisson gauge hanging overhead started rapidly up the scale. Five pounds, ten pounds, twenty pounds; the tank grew hot as the air roared in. Thirty pounds. Ramsay's ears began to ring. He stared down at the men on the deck. He must get the bubbles in their blood compressed again before they clogged a heart valve, stopped circulation forever. Thirty-five, forty—he looked up at the needle. Only halfway up, and his head was throbbing madly already. He glanced down, caught a sidewise glimpse of the inner lock door slowly opening. What was Clark doing there? He turned to look. No, there was his bosun's mate leaning over Williams, tugging at his breastplate. He stared again at the swinging inner door and stopped horrorstricken. There in the door of the inner lock was Carlotta, deathly pale, a trickle of red oozing from her lips!

In agony, she looked across at Ramsay, gasped: "Let me out, quick! My lungs are bursting!" She staggered; something dropped from her hand across the sill; she leaned against the bulkhead, clutching it feebly for support.

Immobile, Ramsay stared an instant. He saw a



book flutter open at her feet. So; Carlotta had been reading in the inner lock and had been caught there when the tank was suddenly pressed into service. Never before had she experienced compressed air; now her unaccustomed body was getting it like a hammer blow, was crumpling under the impact. Involuntarily Ramsay's fingers closed on the wheel of the inlet valve, shut it off, reached over to the exhaust valve and started to release the pressure. And then his eyes rested on the deck, on Tom, motionless and stiff, on Frank, twisting with "the bends."

No, he could not do it. The precious minutes lost, a second sudden release of pressure on his shipmates might cost them their lives. Carlotta would have to take it. He grasped the inlet valve and opened it wide. Again the air roared in, the gauge went up. Sixty pounds. Blood started to ooze from his own mouth; his brain whirled dizzily from the rapidly mounting pressure. He saw Carlotta go suddenly white, her fingers lose their grasp on the bulkhead, saw her slide gently to the deck. Fainted under the pressure. He gritted his teeth and clung to the valve. He must get the pressure up on Tom and Frank, never mind the others. Seventy pounds. Somewhat more softly now against that cushion the incoming air was hammered in by the compressors, still pushing the needle up the scale. Eighty pounds, about the pressure on the ocean floor. Enough. With a gasp of relief, Ramsay shut off the air, his curiously numbed fingers hardly feeling the valve wheel.

Torn by conflicting anxieties, Ramsay looked from Carlotta to his divers, then with sudden decision flung himself on his knees to help Clark, who was struggling with a socket wrench over the breastplate bolts of the unconscious Tom.

Ramsay watched a moment as the bosun's mate, like himself groggy from the jolt of the suddenly applied pressure, fumbled uncertainly over Tom, trying to fit his socket wrench to the irregularly shaped bronze nuts protruding from the edges where breastplate and diving suit met.

"No time for that, Bill. Cut him out of it!"

Clark dropped the wrench, reached for the knife dangling from the lanyard round his neck, slashed Tom's dripping suit open round his chest, slit the rubber cuffs circling his wrists and dragged him out of the rig through the hole.

"Get him in the inner lock. There's more room there," mumbled Ramsay, rising. He turned, crawled through the rounded opening in the interior bulkhead and nearly stumbled over Carlotta. Stooping, he picked up the unconscious girl and felt a sharp pang as her soft form stirred in his arms, her wide eyes fluttered open, smiled wanly up at him.

"Ah, Señor Ramsay, never mind me. I am all right now. Tend your men."

A moment Ramsay gazed into her face, his heart pounding violently, then gently sat her on a bench in the far end of the chamber.

"Bravo, Carlotta! You're a real Navy girl!" A

brighter smile answered him as he turned hurriedly toward the door, reached through, helped the bosun's mate lift the unconscious Tom through the bulkhead into the inner lock and stretch him out on the wooden deck. Clark slipped back to the outer lock to release Martin from his rig, while his captain ripped Tom's undershirt off and exposed his body.

As he thought. Despairingly he scanned the mass of purple blotches all over Tom's stomach, caused by the bursting of innumerable tiny blood vessels, a sure symptom of "the bends." But that strange oval welt of swollen flesh circling his shoulders? What had caused that?

Alone, he strove to revive Williams, dashed ammonia over his face, started feverishly with artificial respiration, pressing in Tom's chest, swinging his arms back to induce breathing. And all the while, he stared at the welts round Tom's neck, seeking dizzily to explain them. Nothing to do with "the bends," yet apparently that was what had knocked Tom out even before he had started his rise.

"Captain Ramsay!" A soft voice in his ear. Startled he paused an instant with his respiration, looked up. There was Carlotta at his side. "Captain, what can I do to help?"

"Anything to start his blood circulating!" Ramsay leaned down, pressed in Tom's chest. "See if you can get some whisky down his throat." He swung back Tom's arms. "There's a bottle in that locker behind you." Back came the arms, again he pressed Tom's

breast. "And then massage his legs!"

Silently Carlotta turned to the medical locker. Ramsay continued his task. As he bent down, he caught through the open door, a glimpse of Frank Martin, struggling unsteadily to his feet. The pressure had compressed the bubbles in his blood, given him immediate relief. Slowly he crawled through into the inner lock, slumped back against the wall of the "iron doctor," looked anxiously down at Tom's discolored body.

"How is he, cap'n?" mumbled Frank.

"Still out," replied Ramsay, pressing desperately on Tom's chest, then suddenly swinging his arms back, releasing the pressure. "What's the matter with Tom? What happened down there?"

"Lots," answered Frank briefly. "Tom fell through the hole into the wreck; dropped twenty feet maybe till he brought up on a grating, head down, feet up, an' anchored to that iron patch we was fittin'. Terrible position Tom was in, cap'n! An' then they nearly tore his arms out trying to pull him free!"

"Fell through the hole into the wreck; dropped twenty feet maybe—" The words raced wildly through Ramsay's mind. That explained the black and blue ring round Tom's shoulders; he had had an incipient "squeeze"; the sudden increase in water pressure over his body when he dropped, before his air pressure could build up correspondingly in his helmet, had started to force his torso into the vacant space in his helmet, to force his entrails up into his

chest, had knocked him cold immediately. Ramsay shuddered. A few more feet to that drop, a little less remaining air pressure in Tom's helmet and lungs at that instant, and Tom's body would have been molded like a jelly into his helmet. Lucky the "squeeze" had only started; even so that was a terrible welt round his neck where his shoulders had commenced to slide through his breastplate into the helmet, like an oversized cork partly driven into a bottle.

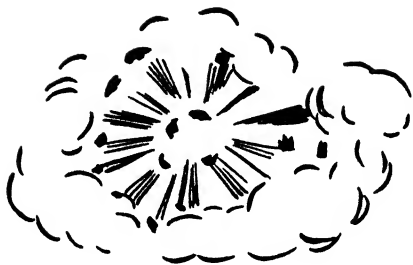
Carlotta leaned over him again with the whisky. "How much, señor?"

Without looking up, Ramsay called to Martin:

"Hold his jaws open, Frank." The captain paused an instant in his respiration movement, looked at Tom's pallid face, then into Carlotta's anxious eyes.

"Give him all you can get down, Carlotta. It's nip and tuck whether we bring him round or not. The ocean's 'squeezed' him!"





## CHAPTER XX

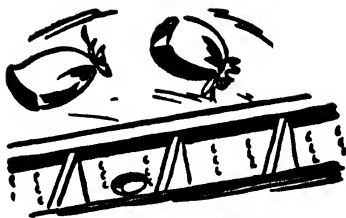
CARLOTTA leaned forward across the nautical oak desk in her little cabin, incongruously strewn with toilet articles, powder puffs and cream, and carefully regarded herself in the mirror propped across the unused pigeonholes.

"A little more rouge here. I am still pale. And I must hurry. It is late for dinner." She turned her left cheek. "After those terrible hours in that tank, to-night I must be gay, beautiful. *Si, si*, the lipstick also." She turned her mouth. "Ah, my heart is gone. Such a caballero! So tenderly he lifted me in his arms. And what a sailor! His men first. At sea it should be so. But ashore with him! Ships, men, gold, nothing will count but me! And now he calls me Carlotta. When he says it, it is like music, so—Carlotta." Dreamily she looked into her mirror. "*Bueno!* I am myself again, after that terrible air pressure. So long it took us to decompress—see, already, I talk like a diver—three hours.

"Each time they blow out some air, it is like a weight lifted from my breasts. And all the while we

work, oh, so desperately, to revive *el señor* Williams. An hour goes by, he shows no signs of life, we are in despair. I massage his temples; Bill Clark works on one leg; Frank Martin, who is still in much pain, works on the other; and all the while, the captain swings his arms, presses his chest. Another hour we work, then, what joy! Tom's heart flutters, he breathes a little. And when the third hour is gone and the pressure is all released Tom is fully conscious, breathes naturally, but is weak because as he says, "I feel like an elephant stepped on me." So when the door of the tank finally swings open and I stumble out into the arms of my frantic father, it is only Tom Williams, not I, who must be carried below to his bunk. Carlotta, *gracias a Dios*, is as well as anyone, qualified by pressure to dive thirty fathoms deep! And now my shawl! Philip Ramsay has hardly noticed me since I came aboard. Tonight there is a moon, the sea, a gentle breeze. And how my heart still tingles from his touch."

She laughed gaily. "Qualified by pressure to work on the *Santa Cruz*! Perhaps if I do not intrigue him as a woman, I may yet interest him as a diver!" She flung her brilliant shawl about her shoulders, stepped out of her cabin into the passage, took a deep breath of the soft sea air, then, to a gasp of admiration from the captain lounging impatiently near the table, swept into the little wardroom and slid gracefully into the chair which Ramsay, still stunned by her beauty, hurriedly drew back for her.



## CHAPTER XXI

GRIMLY Frank Martin guided the steel plate up between two gratings, held it clear as it rose slowly past the rungs of an inverted ladder, hung vertically just below the opening in *El Fuego's* shell. With fierce satisfaction then, that task done, he shined his submarine lamps through the water round the topsy turvy engineroom where in the darkness he had extricated Tom. His heart sank as the light flashed back from a maze of pipes, protruding levers, gauges, upside-down machinery. How in the darkness had he ever dodged all that wreckage, got out without tangling his lifelines in dozens of invisible obstructions?

And had he been caught, he would have had company. His light, gleaming dully through the water, roiled by the bubbles rising from his exhaust between the engine columns, shone back from a whitening skeleton sprawled between piston rod and cross-head guide, the bones standing starkly out against the tattered dungarees shrouding them. And against the gaugeboard another, spectral in the shadowy glow diffused in a luminous ball from his light. Engineers,



trapped below decks when their ship sank, drowned like rats among their gratings, grisly ghosts haunting their dead engines.

Martin hurriedly swung his light away, shined it on the grating before him, carefully worked his way toward the escape, signaled to be hauled up, pushed the dangling patch plate aside as he swung past it, and rose, a strange appearing figure, through the opening into the vague gray light of the deep sea.

As his helmet came clear, Joe Hawkins grabbed him and drew him on the shell plating. Martin adjusted his air, then pointed to the manila line from which their plate was hanging. Joe moved cautiously over, and, taking a firm grip, heaved the line up between his legs a foot at a time till at last the plate came solidly against the under side of the steel plating with the stud bolt sticking upward in the middle.

"Hold 'er now, Joe, while I slide on the strongback!" shouted Frank, shoving his helmet against his shipmate's and peering through the port at him.

"O.K., but shake it up! This plate's gittin' heavier every second!" answered Joe, his face drawn and the muscles in his neck standing out like whipcords as he heaved upward.

Frank dropped to his knees, reached inboard to the strongback bar he had left on the shell-crusted plating and dragged it and the nut tied to it over toward the hole.

"Steady now, Joe," more to himself than to Joe, who four feet away through the water could not hear

him. Frank bent over the opening, lifted the heavy angle bar, pushed aside a few inches the manila lanyard on which Joe was hauling, to clear the edge of the bar, and gently slid the strongback bar down over the threads of the central stud till the two ends of the bar rested on the shell, lapping perhaps four inches on each side.

With a grunt of satisfaction, Martin reached over through the water, gripped the marline tied through a hole in the standing flange of the bar and drew the securing nut toward him. Unscrewing his knife, he cut loose the nut, resecured his knife, and bent low over the stud with the nut for the final touch to the job.

But it would not screw on. Time after time, he twisted the nut over the end of the stud, tilted it a bit this way, a little that way, jammed it hard down, tried it gently. No use, he could not catch a thread. Swearing violently, he lifted the nut clear, turned it upside down and tried it again. Still no go. The plate before him started to wobble wildly in the opening; he looked up to see Joe's strained eyes fixed on him, Joe's lips moving in unheard imprecations. Still gripping the nut, Frank straightened up and, shoving his helmet against Joe's, called out:

"Hold 'er steady, Joe, fer the love o' Mike! How kin I work with that stud jumping all over the ocean?"

"Steady?" cried Joe. "Who d'ye think I am, Hercules? Ain't ye got that nut secured yet?"

"Naw, an' it ain't started yet, let alone secured. Quit shakin' like a jellyfish an' gimme a chance at it." Frank slid to his knees, again tried to start the nut. It would not catch. Was it the right size? He leaned far over, stared closely at the nut, then at the stud. The size was correct, no question about that, both one inch diameter. He held the nut up in the dim light against his faceplate and looked through it. Threads O.K. It must be the stud then. Carefully he set the nut down on the plate and, lying down, pushed the submarine lamp against the stud, thrust his faceplate hard against it. One close look was enough. The threads on the end of the stud, evidently jammed somewhere in the wreckage below when the plate fell through into the engine room, were all burred up. In that condition, the nut would never start. The whole assembly would have to go up on deck to have the threads recut. No use struggling further. He lifted clear the strongback bar, staggered to his feet, pressed his faceplate close to Joe's and turned off his air.

"No go, Joe!" he shouted. "The threads on that stud are all bunged up. Slack off a bit on the lanyard while I tilt the plate around so's we can pull it back through the hole, an' we'll send it up on deck!" Frank turned on his air and dropped back on his knees.

"The son of a gun!" Joe started slowly to slack off. "An' me breakin' my back holdin' 'er up all that time fer nothin'! Why didn't he find it out in the first place?" Hand over hand, he lowered away.

A sharp slap on his leg. He ceased lowering, bent over toward Frank, heard faintly through the water:

"Vast lowering! We've dropped it so far I can't reach it! Take it up again so's I can work it through the hole!"

But to Frank's surprise, instead of lifting Joe went calmly on lowering till the plate brought gently up below, when, with evident relief, he let go the lanyard, straightened up, and, as if to intensify Frank's astonishment, proceeded to swing his arms vigorously through the water, meanwhile bending over so far backward that Martin instinctively leaped between Joe and the hole, fearing that he also might lose his balance and topple into the wreck.

"Cut it out, Joe," growled Frank. "Think I wanna stage an encore rescuing you? An' what's the circus about, anyway? Why didn't ye lift that plate like I told you?"

"Keep yer shirt on, Frank, an' don't go worryin' over me. I'm just working the kinks outa my back, that's all. But about pulling that plate outa the hole, are ye crazy? Ye had to drive it through with a sledge yesterday, didn't ye? Well, how ye gonna get it out? Get down there inside the wreck with the stiffs an' maybe git them to help hammer it back through the hole?"

Hammer it back? A little dizzily Frank considered that. Joe was right. The plate would never slide through, and as for forcing it—ridiculous. Glumly he stared down at the hole. Sealing it had seemed so

simple up on deck. He tried to think, his numbed senses refused to respond, no ideas came. In despair, he turned again to Hawkins.

"What in hell kin we do, Joe?"

"Got a file?"

"A file?" Frank's face lighted up. "Let's see what the skipper put in that tool bag." He plodded slowly over to the canvas bag he had brought down the day before and rummaged through the water filling it. Sure enough, mixed with wrenches, hammers, and chisels were some files, flat, round and triangular. "The cap'n sure thinks of everything," muttered Martin, pulling out a triangular file. "This'll fix it quick." He waved the file triumphantly in the water, pushed his way back to the hole.

"O.K. Joe, pull 'er up again, so's I can get at that stud and I'll true them burred threads in jig time."

But Joe made no move to man the lifting line at his feet. Instead he shook his helmet and motioned Frank toward the lanyard.

"Nothin' doin', Frank. I'll do the brainwork this trip. You man the lifting rig yerself. Gimme that file."

For a brief instant, the two divers stared beligerently at each other through the narrow film of water between their eyeports; then Frank, the justice of his shipmate's statement slowly registering, handed over the file, silently stooped over and began himself to hoist away on the heavy plate. It was hard work dragging that two-hundred-pound weight upward;

if only he could let the ship's winch take the pull, thought the torpedoman as his heart pounded under the strain. But that would not work; the *Lapwing* above was rolling in the waves and anything suspended from her boom would rise and fall as she rolled. The first time that plate at his feet came hard up against the shell, with the *Lapwing* rolling away, the line would part and once again he would have the job of searching for it in the wreckage below. He gritted his teeth and fought the rope cutting into his wrists. No, it was better this way.

A final heave and the plate came metal to metal with the bottom. Through the trickle of air funneling upward from Joe's exhaust and streaming through the water past his faceplate, he saw Joe lean over the recalcitrant plate; in a moment he caught clearly the shrill rasp of the file echoing sharply through the sea as Joe started truing up the mashed threads. Unpleasantly that sound, intensified by transmission through solid water, vibrated in Frank's ears, set his clenched teeth on edge. Straining hard on the lanyard, he waited impatiently, watching Joe's clumsy figure working the file in between the threads, rasping vigorously at first, then more gently as the burred edges vanished and the threads were restored to some semblance of their helical shape.

One final screech of the file, long drawn out as Joe swung it round the stud, and thankfully Frank saw him lay the file aside and slide the strongback bar

down over the stud. Frank slacked the lanyard a bit to ease his aching back, relieve his tired arms; then, peering down again at his shipmate, he noted in surprise that Joe was only fumbling aimlessly around the opening. Each second now the load on his stretched arms seemed to double. Feverishly Frank waited for the signal that the strongback was secured and he could release his grip. No sign. He dared not slack out any more to ease his position. With rising anger at Joe's ineptness he clung to the line, wondering how long he could hang on.

Joe struggled to his knees. In relief Frank prepared to ease off and let the strongback take the weight. A metallic clatter; he felt Joe's helmet bang against his own, saw the air bubbling from Joe's exhaust suddenly cut off, felt Joe shut his air off also, in the silence that followed, heard Joe call:

"Say, Frank! Where did ye put that nut?"

The nut? Then Joe did not have the strongback secured after all; he must still hang on to that terrible weight. The nut? Wearily Frank tried to remember. What had he done with it? Oh, yes! He had laid it down while he stooped over to examine closely with the light what was the matter with the stud. Joe must be blind; if he could himself only let go for a moment of that lanyard cutting into his wrists, breaking his back, he'd find it in no time. Why, he'd carefully put it down in plain sight right in front of— And then Frank's stomach seemed to congeal, his heart stop beating. The nut was gone!

He had put it down on the plate itself, and then Joe had dropped the plate back into the wreck! He groaned audibly. No hope ever of finding a tiny object like a nut inside that engine room.

Despairingly Frank tightened his hold on the lanyard; gasping for breath in the dead air inside his helmet, he answered,

"The nut's lost, Joe! Inside the wreck. Telephone the topside to send us down another. Quick!" He paused, took several deep breaths and added dizzily: "Tell 'em to make it two this time, less'n we lose one again. Make 'em shake it up fer the love o' Mike! I'm nearly broke in two. An' turn on my air before I choke to death!"

Gloomily Joe nodded, drew back and opened first Frank's air valve then his own. For a moment he ventilated his helmet thoroughly, felt his head clear a trifle as a torrent of fresh air swept through; then taking a last deep breath, he cut off his air again, twisted his mouth opposite the transmitter and sang out:

"Topside there! Did ye hear what happened?" He pressed his head against the side of his helmet to jam the headset more tightly over his ears and heard Ramsay's voice echoing in his receivers:

"O.K. Joe, I got it over Frank's phone. Reilly is already stripping a couple more nuts off that spare piston. They start down the descending line on a shackle in a minute. Get a little air now, Joe, then I'll talk to you some more."



"Aye, aye, cap'n." Joe turned on his air, gulped it in huge drafts to his panting lungs, looked over at Frank, straining at the lanyard, his helmet bent far forward, his waist sagging under the weight of his lead belt, his body swaying slowly in the water as he struggled to hold the heavy plate in position.

"Serves him right," mumbled Joe to himself. "He should 'ave been more careful with that nut." Unconsciously he straightened himself up and felt a sharp twinge in his back from his own trick at holding up that plate. A little more sympathetically, he glanced again at Frank and caught through his faceplate a glimpse of his grimly set face, his agonized eyes, as he strove to bear up against the drag. Could Frank hold out till those nuts arrived? And if he didn't, what would happen? Joe's eyes followed the taut lanyard from Frank's hands down past the strongback bar to where the lanyard was secured to an eye alongside the stud. The dark thread of a piece of marline floating lazily upward from the strongback caught his eye. The nut had originally been tied to that to prevent its loss till needed. If Frank hadn't been such a boot, he would have retied it when he found he couldn't screw it on, instead of putting it down, of all places, right on that loose plate. Well, he was paying for it now.

The floating bit of marline attracted Joe. Vaguely he speculated on it, then reached over and grasped it. A good preventer line on the strongback; if Frank dropped the plate and the stud slid out through the

strongback, he could at least keep the bar from sliding through and getting lost like the nut. He twisted the hempen strand in his fingers and drew it clear of the manila lanyard chafing against the stud, rising past it to Frank's blue and swollen hands just above. An idea came to him. If with the marline he seized the lanyard to the stud just above the bar, it would serve to take the strain till they got a nut on, relieve Frank of that load before he collapsed. Good. Joe drew his knife, slashed the marline free of the end of the bar, threw a clove hitch round the stud just above the bar, hurriedly passed the bit of marline outside the lanyard, and wound it round and round both lanyard and stud, firmly seizing the manila alongside the threads for a distance of three inches, then secured the free end of the marline, leaving over an inch of stud free to start the nut on. Joe looked up and saw Frank watching him eagerly. With a final jerk, Joe finished the seizing, waved to his mate.

Inch by inch, Frank slacked away, watching till he saw the patch plate take up on the seizing, felt the strain on the lanyard in his hands vanish, while the plate dangled from the strongback, only a few inches down. Not till then did he let go, but when at last he dropped the lanyard, he painfully straightened up, danced wildly around, banging his heavy shoes on the steel hull, vigorously swinging his swelling hands to restore circulation. Finally he sat down alongside Joe, cut off his air, yelled out to him:

"That's usin' yer bean, shipmate. Another minute on that line an' the old back woulda sure buckled amidships. You saved my life." He leaned wearily against the bilge keel, looked up at the descending line swaying rhythmically in the water above and again laid his helmet against Joe's. "Yesterday I was a hero; today I'm about as helpful as a gyrene. Say, what'd they say on the topside about them nuts?"

"They're sending us a couple. But let's belay the talking and catch up a little on our breathing. I'm about all shot." Joe opened wide his air valve and the conversation ended abruptly in a roar of compressed air.

The seconds slipped by. Both divers lay back against the rolling chock, wholly absorbed in the business of breathing, oblivious alike of the capsized wreck on which they sat and the dark ocean in which they were immersed. Beneath them were the dead, around them only water, far above, in another world so far as they were concerned, were their shipmates in the *Lapwing*. For the moment only the main thing in life, breathing, counted with them; struggling against the water pressing in on their chests, they opened as wide as they dared their valves, reveled in currents of air whistling over their faceplates.

A call in Joe's receivers:

"Stand by, below! Shackle coming down the descending line!"

Joe throttled a little on his control valve to make sure he was not too light, dragged himself upright,

pressed his way through the water to the descending line and waited expectantly, knife in hand. A moment more and the shackle slid into sight, hanging from a small lowering line. As it swept by, Joe seized it, cut loose the lowering line and signaled on it to heave in. Turning to examine the shackle, he saw two nuts dangling from it, each individually secured by a separate bit of marline. Carefully Joe cut loose one nut and let the other one, still secured to the shackle, slide down with it till it brought up with a bang against the bilge keel.

Motioning to Frank to stand by the lanyard once more, Joe sank to his knees, scanned the threads an instant doubtfully, finally squared the large nut over the stud and gave it a full turn, then another. His heart pounded violently as he felt the threads catch, the nut start down the stud, finally stop after a third turn when the friction became too great.

"We got her, Frank," he muttered to his shipmate, who was crouching low over him. "Get me the wrench an' I'll sock her home fer a full due!"

"O.K.!" Frank grabbed the tool bag, jerked out an open-ended wrench and shoved it into Joe's waiting fingers.

A little awkwardly Joe fitted it over the nut, heaved round a few turns to cut the threads anew, then found the nut slack enough once more to run it down by hand till he brought up on the seizing. Once again Frank manned the lanyard, took the strain a few seconds while Joe cut loose the marline, after

which he dragged the plate up a few inches till it came hard up with its gasket bearing against the steel bottom. Joe, working feverishly, twisted the nut down till it bore hand tight against the strongback, and then, with the wrench, jammed it hard down, squeezing the rubber gasket on the patch plate tightly against the shell as the nut ground into the strongback.

Relieved, Frank threw aside the useless lanyard, seized the sledge reposing on the hull near by, and, while Joe held the wrench, hammered the end of it round another whole turn to make sure the gasket was firmly compressed all around. He gave the wrench a final rap, tossed the sledge down on the bottom and gazed fondly down on the finished patch.

"Tight as a drumhead, Joe," he sang out. "They couldn't do a better job on her in drydock!"

"Yeah," muttered Joe, "but we'll wait till she gets air in her before celebrating! An' meanwhile, let's get outa here. I'm all wet." He moved over toward the descending line and signaled on his hose to take in the slack. "C'mon, Frank, get under way fer the topside. My suit's as full o' salt water as if I'd been on the bottom fer a week!"



## CHAPTER XXII

"SLACK still going out on Bill!"

Lieutenant Ramsay, seated on the bulwark, telephone headset pressed against his left ear, nodded briefly at the report from the tender "fishing" Clark's lines.

"All right, Joe, only be sure he's taking it." Ramsay eyed the bubbles moving slowly down the surface.

Thirty fathoms deep, Bill Clark, dragging the end of an extra hose, plodded slowly along the bottom, scanning the dark hull of *El Fuego* rising like a cliff from the sea floor. Her capsized bulwarks were buried in the sand, her midship deckhouse flattened out under her, only the rusty steel side loomed up vaguely visible a few feet fore and aft. As he breasted through the water, Clark searched each plate from buttstrap to buttstrap, looking for port-holes in the side through which he might insert his blowing hose. Amidships nothing. Leaning a bit

farther forward to counteract the drag of his lengthening lines, Bill strode along, straining his eyes against the hull. Still all solid steel. She must have been built as a freighter with no openings for stateroom or crew ventilation in her sides.

Exhausted from his long walk, Clark came to the bow. Here he stumbled over an anchor hanging topsy-turvy from the hawsepipe, half buried in the sand. Awkwardly he caught the shank with one hand, saved himself from falling, sat down wearily on the inboard fluke and, gazing at the hulk towering over him, considered. What next?

Not a solitary opening in the hull itself could he see from the bottom. And if they were to lift that ship, they must get their airhoses secured well inside before they commenced blowing or the air would all escape. If there were no ports to shove the hoses through, two ways only were left—they could drill holes through the side, or they could burn them. Briefly Bill turned the problem over. Drill? He gazed dismally up at the steel plates before him. Not if he could help it. He had no hankering to lean up against a heavy air drill boring through that steel, with the knowledge that if the bit caught in the hole and the drill bucked or twisted out of his hands it might tear his suit wide open before he could shut it down. No, no drilling. That was all right in the old days when there was no other way, but not now; burning was a lot easier. Clark shut off his air and called into his telephone:

"Topside there!"

On deck, Ramsay, already alarmed at the length of hose his diver had out, and beginning to suspect trouble below, stiffened involuntarily at the call. He answered immediately. In flat mushed-up tones he caught the message.

"Skipper, not a port in sight on this side; nothing I can shove a hose in, an' I've searched all the way to her bow. Send the torch down the descendin' line an' I'll burn a hole through fer the hose!" Bill's voice grew even more indistinct, then he added: "Take in the slack; I'm startin' back amidships!" The rumbling of air came in over Ramsay's receiver; Bill was through talking.

Looking aft along the bulwark to where Bill's lifelines went over the rail, Ramsay sang out:

"Mind the slack on Clark; he's coming back to the descending line!" He looked hastily over the fantail. Joe was tending, with Sorensen backing him up. Seated on the bench, completely dressed except for his helmet and belt, was Frank Martin, ready to clap on the rest of his rig and go overboard in an emergency to help the man below. Lolling on a coil of hawsers alongside the towing bitts was Tom, still too weak to dive but too well to hold in his bunk below decks. The skipper beckoned to him. Except for himself, Tom was the only man unoccupied on deck who understood the operation of the torch.

"Tom, Bill wants the torch. Rig it up, four bells and a jingle, and send it down the descending line."



"Aye, aye, cap'n."

Tom, a little lame, climbed the ladder to the superstructure and commenced coupling hoses to the banks of compressed gases. For a moment, Ramsay watched him, then fidgeted uneasily. Tom's hands were still so swollen, his arms so stiff that he was making little progress. Ramsay looked at his watch, shook his head uneasily. Already twenty minutes on the bottom for Bill; the rest of his hour would be gone before Tom got the torch ready; his dive would be wasted and, with only three divers available, that meant a third of a day's work shot and nothing to show for it. Tom must have help. Looking anxiously over the deck, the skipper's eye fell on Pablo, sprawled out in the shade of the starboard winch just across the passage.

Reaching over, he shook Pablo vigorously, woke him with a start.

"Topside, sailor! Lay up on the superstructure and lend Williams a hand. Pronto!"

Pablo shook himself, rose and with surprising alacrity scrambled up the ladder. Ramsay looked over the side at the waves rolling steadily by; the diver's air was beginning to break surface much nearer the *Lapwing*. Evidently Bill was over half-way back to the descending line; in a few minutes he would be ready for the torch. Ramsay looked up at his men on the superstructure and whistled in disgust. The job was going no faster; Pablo might be a good seaman but he was no mechanic.

Exasperated at the delay, Ramsay jerked the receiver off his head, started up the ladder to tackle the job himself, but stopped short on the first step and slowly slipped the headset on again. His diver on the bottom needed a good man, intelligence, on that phone. Swiftly he looked around and settled back on the bulwark resignedly. The only men he could trust to hear straight were all busy. He must stick by the phone. He pressed the receiver to his ear, the while watching the bubbles in the water getting closer and closer to the descending line hanging over the rail. Apparently everything was all right below. In the telephone, mingled with the steady roar of the air, he could make out vaguely curses, snatches of song, more curses. Bill was relieving the solitude in his normal style.

A touch on his arm. Ramsay twisted inboard and saw Carlotta balancing uncertainly on the mooring hawsers flaked down in the passageway, looking up at him eagerly.

"Señor capitán, you need help? Let me relieve you at that telephone."

Ramsay looked at her uncertainly, astonished at the idea. Carlotta, noting his indecision, pressed her point.

"Come, pass me that receiver. Every telephone company knows well that girls make the best operators; why then should the captain tie himself to that job when he is more needed elsewhere?" She smiled, reached up, pulled the headset lightly off, slid it over

her own ear, and, climbing up on the bulwark, took the transmitter also from his unresisting hands.

"All right, Carlotta, go to it! But whatever you hear, you've got to keep listening, and don't blame me if your ears burn. Bosun's mates aren't saints!" Ramsay dropped off the rail, clambered rapidly up the steep ladder to the superstructure deck, looked back momentarily at Carlotta, a lovely picture in white outlined sharply against a dark background of rolling waves, and caught a glimpse of her face gradually changing expression as, becoming accustomed to the sound of the air roaring through the diver's helmet below, she began to get the drift of what Bill Clark, alone on the bottom of the sea, oblivious of everything except the world of water surrounding him, unoppressed by any restraints of earthly discipline, was saying to himself to relieve his solitude!





## CHAPTER XXIII

ON the superstructure, Lieutenant Ramsay, with slight assistance from Tom and none at all from Pablo, worked feverishly coupling one torch hose to the oxygen bank, a second to the bank of hydrogen bottles, and the third to the compressed air manifold. That done, he hurriedly plugged in the cable to the igniter rheostat, threw the switch and tested the igniter itself.

"Stand by now, Tom," he warned, "and watch those regulators when the torch lights off. Two hundred pounds on the oxygen, a hundred and fifty on the hydrogen. And if the gas banks we're on start to get low, cut in the reserve banks behind you. I've got 'em all coupled up to the valves on the manifolds." Tom nodded, the skipper turned to Pablo.

"When I get below, you feed me out these hoses, and then give Tom a hand if he has to roll any of these gas bottles around. Savvy?"

"*Si, si, capitán.*"

Ramsay dropped down the ladder, to the main deck and waved his hand. Leaning over the edge of the deckhouse, Pablo dropped the torch, with the igniter seized to it, into his captain's hands. Reaching into the bosun's locker just abaft him, Ramsay

grabbed a shackle, unscrewed the pin, slipped the shackle over the descending line, screwed the pin back hand tight, and secured the torch to the shackle with a fathom of small stuff.

Ramsay looked about. A little forward, perched on the rail Carlotta was watching him. Just abaft, was Joe "fishing" the diving lines with a few fathoms of dripping life-line and hose inboard and several seamen coiling more slack on the rack against the deckhouse.

Joe turned toward the skipper.

"Bill's at the descendin' line, cap'n. He just signaled 'one' on it. An' I got in all the slack on him now I can get."

Ramsay nodded, satisfied, dragged his torch a little forward to make sure it slid below freely without tangling round the descending line and ordered curtly:

"Superstructure there! Start paying out the hoses!"

Pablo commenced to ease out the coils. With the slack coming down, Ramsay dropped the shackle into the water, followed it with the torch, fed the cable, made up of three small hoses and a duplex rubber covered electric wire all seized tightly together every few feet, over the rail. The torch disappeared beneath the surface; the hoses attached to it slipped rapidly out over the rail. Fifty feet over, then a hundred. Ramsay looked up the passage toward Carlotta, hesitated a fraction of a second, then in

his usual gruff tone, sang out:

"Telephone there! Tell Clark to look out for the torch on the descending line!"

A seagoing "Aye, aye, sir!" floated back along the rail. Carlotta snapped the transmitter to her lips. "Hello, Bill, hello, hello! Coming down with the torch on the descending line. Keep a bright eye out for it!"

Blushing violently as he caught a broad grin spreading over Joe's face at the incongruity between Carlotta's appearance and her lingo, Ramsay turned hastily outboard to hide his confusion and continued a little jerkily to pay out the torch lines.

On the bottom, the bosun's mate caught the message, wondered an instant over the strange voice, then promptly forgot the matter as the torch shot into his sight. Down a few more fathoms and he caught it, jerked "One" on it as a signal to the topside that he had it, cut it loose from its shackle, threw a bowline into the stray line holding it, and slid the loop over his arm.

Clark stepped away from the descending line and looked up through the water dubiously, at the surging lines overhead. Too much chance of fouling up while he worked. There floating up over his head was the descending line, near by his own lifeline and hose, alongside that the airhose that he was to leave in the ship as a blowing hose. Now beside both these was the combination cable for the torch. Too much work dragging all those lines with him as he walked;

little chance of keeping them disentangled. He must leave something. Cautiously he slipped the lanyard to the blowing hose off his arm and secured it to the descending line. That at least could stay there till he needed it.

Dragging only the torch hoses now as extra equipment, Bill backed away from the descending line, made sure he was clear, and walked a few steps across the hard sand bottom till he bumped the side of *El Fuego*. Keeping one hand against the shell, he walked slowly forward till he felt a buttstrap, then explored both up and down along the strake of plates opposite him till he had located both the upper and lower plate laps, and sweeping his hand over the plate between found with somewhat more difficulty the line of rivets which marked the stiffening frame inside. For the quickest job he must avoid all such obstructions and work only on the plain steel plate.

Satisfied with his search, Bill noted a smooth spot on the side about breast high as he stood. Stepping back a little, he lifted the torch before his faceplate, turned on the compressed air, the oxygen, and the hydrogen. A long stream of bubbles shot out from the tip of the torch.

Twisting his head round, Bill shouted into his transmitter:

"Turn on the igniter!"

A moment, then in his ears, a sharp reply:

"The igniter is on!"

With his left hand, Bill gripped the igniter dangling on its cable a few feet below the torch, brought its tip over the end of the torch in the stream of gases, pressed together the igniter contacts, let them go.

As the contacts parted, an electric spark leaped across the gap, the gases ignited with a bang, and a brilliant ball of orange fire flamed out in the water, burning against the sea pressure with a vibratory roar that beat against Clark's ears like an unmuffled airplane engine running at wide open throttle.

Clark dropped the igniter, lifted the torch close before his faceplate, studied for a moment the flame sheathed in a mingled cloud of air and steam. A little shy on hydrogen. Cautiously he opened the hydrogen valve a trifle and the flame lengthened out, assuming even a deeper sodium tinge as it flared amid the surrounding water.

Satisfied with his adjustments, Bill leaned against the wreck, carefully swung his torch in on the spot he had selected and braced the head of the torch against the reaction of the gases shooting out. A flicker as the rust and paint on the steel burned off; then the iron beneath the torch started to glow, became a bright red. Bill pressed his trigger. A jet of oxygen at high pressure shot through the flame, hit the glowing iron, set it on fire, in an instant punched a hole in the steel plate, through which a stream of pure white sparks, uncanny in their brilliance as they flashed in incandescent streamers through the



dark water, gleamed like rockets in the night. Gone now were the darkness and the unearthly silence of the ocean floor. In the dazzling light and the roar of the flame, Bill Clark in his ungainly diving armor cast a huge shadow through the deep as he swept the tip of his torch in a small circle against the side of *El Fuego*, burning out a hole perhaps three inches across. The flame came back to its starting point; the metal disk inside the cut bent inboard, dropped inside. Clark released the trigger. Instantly the flame shrank back to a short orange glow; the brilliance of the burning iron faded. Leaning forward till his helmet almost touched the side, he examined the opening. Assured that the cut was clean, he raised his torch, turned off the gases, then stood a moment blinking in the sudden darkness which enveloped him, while the silence that followed seemed almost painful to his ears.

Gradually Clark's eyes regained some degree of vision, the dark shadow of the hulk took shape again in the water and he shuffled forward, signaling first for more slack on both his own lines and on the torch. Two more holes to burn, one well forward, one well aft; that's where the skipper wanted his blowing hoses.

Stooping far forward, Bill struggled to make headway along the side. Evidently the tide was strengthening; he felt it pressing him backward, exerting a strong pull on the lines he was dragging. Each step became an effort. As he approached the bow, the cur-

rent threatened to sweep him off his feet completely. Gritting his teeth, Bill dropped to his hands and knees and started to crawl along the sand in order to offer the minimum surface to the force of the sea. His hoses streamed out behind, the unseen current, pressing against his body, made even crawling difficult.

Hugging the side of *El Fuego* for protection, Clark struggled along till dimly he could make out, ahead, the bow rising from the bottom. He paused then, and, still stretched out in the sand, drew his torch forward, lighted it. Lying on his side, unable this time to make a search for the most suitable spot to burn, he swung the roaring flame in against the ship, pressed his trigger and punched a hole through. But burning this time was more difficult; the mud stirred up from the bottom clouded the water, obscured his view, made the task of holding the torch a constant distance from the steel impossible. Moving more by feel than by sight, he circled his cut, but the steel disk when he finished failed to drop.

Clark ran his fingers over the slagged edges and found a holiday a quarter of an inch wide he had missed. Keeping one finger on the spot lest he lose it, he swung his torch in again till the flame almost touched his finger. It would under ordinary circumstances have seared the flesh, which here, paradoxically, was protected from the flame by the water in which everything was immersed. Moving his finger a little, he followed in its wake with the tip of the

torch. Soon the remaining bridge of iron vanished in a shower of sparks and the steel plug fell with a clatter inside the hull. Clark grunted with satisfaction, turned off his gases, and, twisting about, crawled aft. Somewhere amidships, the current eased. With relief, he pulled himself erect and plodded steadily along the counter toward the stern.

A call in his receivers:

"Your time's up. Stand by at the descending line to rise."

Bill stopped, craned his neck to bring his mouth near his transmitter, shouted:

"Lemme alone! I got just one more hole yet!" Quickening his pace, he hastened along till overhead he caught the glint of the bronze propeller, then braced himself against the side to resume work.

Another call on his phone:

"Captain says you're down an hour. Get over to the descending line!"

Clark looked at the ship. Five minutes more with the torch and the job was done. It would take the next man half an hour to get set. Half to himself, half into his transmitter he muttered,

"Aw, tell him to go chase himself!" He lifted the igniter, flashed off his torch and once more started to burn. Here it was something like, he told himself. Clear, quiet water, good vision. In a few seconds he had the iron flaming like a comet's tail from the tip of his torch. Carefully he guided the tip around, a steady eighth of an inch from the surface, making

a beautifully clean cut through the shell, till with a contented sigh, he came back to his starting point, saw the metal inside his cut topple out and leave a hole almost as round as if turned in a lathe.

Turning off the torch for the last time, Bill shouted into his phone:

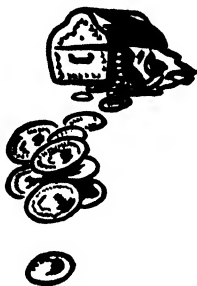
"Job's done. Take up the torch!"

He waited till he felt on the torch the three jerks that showed the tender above was ready to hoist, then, letting go the hoses, watched them vanish in the water. Wholly unencumbered now, he plodded to the descending line and paused briefly when he saw the blowing hose he had originally brought down swaying gently in the current from the point where he had secured it to the manila line. His job had originally been to shove that hose into the hull. There was no time now. Someone else would have to finish.

Four jerks on his hose, the signal to stand by to rise. Clark sighted up the lines and paused in dismay. Not three fathoms up, he saw the blowing hose twisted completely round his lifelines. Somehow in his wanderings, he had circled that hose, was foul of it now. If he started up that way, he would soon be jammed. Carefully noting the direction of the crossing, he stepped over the belayed end of the hose and, helmet up, walked round it, watching the turn above. Undulating gracefully as a serpent, he saw his lifelines uncoil from the airhose above, sag away through the water, well clear of everything. Not till then did he give the answering signal and grasp the descend-

ing line to guide himself upward.

A strain came on his breastplate, he was dragged off the bottom, started upward on his two hour journey through that thirty fathoms of sea between himself and the surface.





## CHAPTER XXIV

OVER the starboard rail of the *Lapwing*, three blowing hoses hung in the waves, quivering rhythmically as the air compressors in the engine room throbbed and the air pulsed through the hoses. Below in the depths, each hose led to *El Fuego*, held securely by toggles inside the holes which Bill Clark had burned in her shell. Forward, amidships, aft—the air pounded out by the laboring pistons, raced through the hoses to the ocean floor, blew into *El Fuego's* hull, forcing out the water inside the capsized vessel.

Lining the bulwark, watching the hoses, was practically the entire crew. Facing the gauge board, on the after end of the deckhouse from which the hoses led to the side, stood Ramsay and Arenda, looking for the thousandth time at the pressure gauges. One by one, Ramsay shut the hoses off from the manifold, balanced the air pressure against the sea pressure at the bottom, read the gauges. Still eighty pounds, no sign of any lifting of *El Fuego* either forward or aft. Night and day for forty hours every air compressor on the *Lapwing* had been running full blast forcing air down—enough certainly to have floated a 2000-ton ship; and unless he was badly mistaken in his estimate of *El Fuego's* size, she should

have started to lift by now.

The tortured captain bit his lip in disappointment, turned from the gauge board to the side, looked out over the sea. In a light breeze, the gray waves were rolling endlessly by, unruffled by any bubbles from below. A hundred yards off to starboard bobbed a few yellow cork floats, the markers for his descending lines. Prudently enough the *Lapwing* was hauled well clear of the spot over the wreck. Her captain had no desire to be too close when *El Fuego* came hurtling surfaceward; so the *Lapwing*, with no divers on the bottom to safeguard, swung temporarily to one anchor only, well to windward of the buoys.

Ramsay's gaze wandered from the sea to the rail, paused there a moment on the crew and caught scraps of ribald jests about the chances of *El Fuego's* rising, pointed doubts about his own intelligence. He started forward, pretending to ignore them, when he caught a sympathetic smile from Carlotta, who, clinging to Tom for support, was leaning far over the rail, eagerly looking for bubbles. The captain walked up the passage to join them, but a ring on the bell over the engine room voice tube, brought him back to the manifold with a jerk. He lifted the mouthpiece cover, answered:

"Captain speaking."

From below, mingled with the pounding of the feed pumps and the throb of the compressors, he heard:

"Say, cap'n, this is Reilly. How much longer d'ye

want the compressors?"

Ramsay's brows contracted at the question.

"How much longer? How can I tell; maybe ten minutes, maybe ten hours? I don't exactly know what the displacement of that wreck is; it's anybody's guess how long it'll take. What difference does it make, Mike?"

"Lots, cap'n. The main compressor can't last much longer now; her high pressure cylinder's just about shot and the packing in the h.p. gland is all shot too; I got the gland nuts pulled up hard so's the gland is metal to metal with the stuffing box and I can't get even another turn. The way things are now, the h.p. piston is simply churning up the air without pumping much and most of what's pumped is leaking out the h.p. gland every time she makes a stroke. She'll last about an hour more this way; then I gotta shut down fer an overhaul."

"Shut down?" Ramsay looked gloomily at his blowing hoses. More precious hours lost. "How long'll it take, chief?"

"About a day, unless the cylinder liner's scored. If I have to rebores that, an' I think it'll be necessary, maybe a week."

Involuntarily the skipper whistled. Maybe a week! Those two Westinghouse single cylinder compressors he carried as auxiliaries could supply enough air to keep on diving if he had to, but if he had to wait a week for repairs on the big compound compressor so they could resume blowing— That on top of the



time lost in sweeping would certainly queer the expedition. Dismally Ramsay looked at the gauges, then pressed his mouth against the voice tube.

"All right, chief, if you have to. But keep her rolling just as long as you can." He snapped the voice tube cover closed and looked up to find Arenda at his side, listening anxiously.

"More bad news, Don Diego. If that hulk doesn't come up in sixty minutes, I guess it'll be short rations for all hands for the rest of this cruise. And now that this gang of beachcombers we have for a crew have got used to three square meals a day, I see trouble ahead."

"*Por qué, señor?*" Arenda looked at him puzzled. "Is not everything all right?"

Ramsay emitted a wry laugh.

"Hardly. It's nip and tuck now which blows up first—*El Fuego* or our main air compressor. Let's hope *El Fuego* lets go soonest." He scanned the waves hopelessly, looking for bubbles. "Too much pressure to buck; the air down there displaces only about one seventh as much water as it would near the surface; that big compressor's shoved down over half a million cubic feet by now, and since it's been running continuously in that hot engine room, with not even cold water handy for the jackets and the intercooler, I guess we can't blame the h.p. piston rings for wanting to curl up and rest. But if we have to wait a week before we start this job again—" His voice trailed off gloomily.

More as a matter of routine than anything else, he balanced off the hose to the bow once more and glanced casually up at the gauge. Startled, his lethargy banished, he leaped up on the towing bitts for a closer view of the dial. No, he was not mistaken, the gauge read 78 pounds; while he stared, the needle dropped to 77, then to 76. The pressure on the other end of that hose, where it entered the wreck, was decreasing. That could mean just one thing—the bow of the wreck was rising! He looked at the gauge on the hose to the stern. That too was down a few pounds—the stern also had lifted!

Disregarding the gauges further, Ramsay twisted to starboard, anxiously searched the sea. No change. The cork buoys bobbed placidly in the waves, only an occasional whitecap broke the gray vista of the waters. No sign there. But Ramsay needed none now. His pent up hopes burst in a shout that echoed over the ship:

“Stand by, boys! She’s coming up!”

Almost as one man, the crew looked at him, then continued dubiously to stare at the unruffled sea. Half a minute of painful silence, then a few bubbles of air showed off the starboard bow, widened out a little. An instant later the sea began to foam over a length of two hundred feet and vast geysers of air and froth commenced to spout violently from the waves.

Awe-stricken, the crew of the *Lapwing* gazed as a dull rumble from the depths swept across the agi-

tated sea, followed almost immediately by a loud roar. A dark mass shot through the surface at a sharp angle, pointed skyward an instant, delicately flecked with a tracery of foam sparkling in the sunlight. The bow of *El Fuego*! For a split second it hung poised in air; then, with a deafening smack, it fell back into the sea, pitching erratically. While it leveled off, the rest of the hulk broke surface, with water by the ton pouring off the barnacle-crusted bottom to be blown into fine clouds of spray by the escaping air gushing up from beneath the hulk. The roaring air, the billowing sea, and the innumerable rainbows shining through the clouds of mist over the wreck for a moment held everyone silent. Then, as the rounded bottom of the capsized *El Fuego* finally leveled off and started to roll lazily like a gigantic whale among the turbulent waves, the spell broke and, in five languages, cheers burst from the decks of the *Lapwing* and roared across the water to mingle with the rumble of the air still exhausting from beneath the submerged sides of *El Fuego*.

His heart pounding wildly, for a moment Ramsay yelled with the rest, intoxicated by his first success; thrilled as the divers crowded round to clasp his hand; blushed as the exuberant Arenda flung both arms about him, kissed him on both cheeks; blushed still more as Carlotta, in the shelter of the passageway behind the cheering seamen, her eyes shining and a dazzling smile lighting her face, threw him a kiss that set his blood on fire.

But only for an instant. In spite of the cheers still echoing in his ears, Ramsay relapsed once more into the seaman, critically surveying the situation off his starboard side. Already the bottom of *El Fuego*, projecting some ten feet above the surface, was beginning to catch the breeze and drift off to leeward toward his mooring buoys. He noted that the blowing hoses, which at first floated slack in huge coils as they came up with the ship, were now commencing to tauten as *El Fuego* drifted away. A few minutes more and they would part when they got a real strain, and he could ill afford to lose those hoses.

Ramsay slid off the towing bitts, broke through the knot of yelling sailors and, in a hoarse tone that rose above the din, roared out:

"Stand by to get under way!"

In the lull that followed, he seized his bosun's mate by the shoulder, ordered curtly:

"On the forecastle, Bill! Up anchor!" and as Clark's pipe shrilled out, he turned to Hawkins.

"Man the surfboat, Joe! Run out our starboard quarter mooring hawser to *El Fuego's* stern and make fast somehow to her rudder or her propeller so we can tow her clear. And when that's done, get alongside her, underrun those hoses with a boat hook, and cut 'em loose from the toggles holding 'em inside those holes. Lively now! We've got to save those blowing lines!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

The skipper whirled toward the engine room voice

tube, rang the bell, waited an instant to hear the acknowledgment.

"Engine room, there! Secure all the compressors, we're through! Stand by your main engine. And meanwhile, send up somebody for the surfboat. Shake it up!"

The pounding of the compressors ceased and the *Lapwing*, which for hours had echoed to the throbbing pistons, had quivered from stem to stern, seemed suddenly lifeless as she lay rolling silently in the waves. But not for long. Forward the anchor windlass began to heave in; the rattle of the cable banging against the hawsepipe and clattering round the wildcat soon rang through the ship, spurring on the boat's crew tumbling over the rail into the bobbing surfboat. Last of all came Reilly, in his dungarees, dripping with perspiration as he emerged from the engine room. He slid down the manrope into the cockpit and, almost without stopping in his descent, seized the crank, kicked over his engine and gripped the clutch, ready to go.

Into the sternsheets of the boat went the pelican hook and the outboard end of a mooring line. No sooner was it made fast than Hawkins gave the word and the surfboat shoved off toward the hulk trailing the lengthening hawser astern.

The surfboat tossed unevenly as it entered the broken water foaming all about the wreck. Hawkins slowed down and ran cautiously round the stern, looking for something to secure his line to. Nothing very

promising there—only the shell-encrusted bottom, smooth and sleek, except perhaps the propeller and the rudder itself. The propeller blades would never do, a line would chafe in two round their sharp edges. Carefully he examined the rudder and saw just below the waterline a preventer chain dangling from each side. Down went his tiller, the boat sheered in alongside the rudder, her bow riding in over the sloping counter of *El Fuego* and bumping it as the surfboat came to a stop.

Fore and aft boathooks shot out, hooked the propeller, caught the pintles, while Hawkins, leaving his tiller, fished over the side with another boathook and managed to drag a few links of slack chain in over his gunwale and hold it there till the ever-present Sorensen hurriedly clamped the pelican hook round the links and shoved home the locking pin.

A vigorous push on the forward hook against the propeller and the surfboat slid free; one slash of his knife and Hawkins cut loose the lashing on the hawser. The line to *El Fuego* was ready; Joe rose in the boat, gripped his tiller again and waved to the *Lapwing*. A sharp blast of her whistle answered him. The towing winch on the *Lapwing* reeled in, the hawser, floating crazily in the water, straightened out, gradually took a strain. Already the *Lapwing* had her anchor aweigh; in another moment the surfboat crew saw the water churn under the *Lapwing's* stern, watched the hawser rise out of the water as it came taut, prudently stood well clear of the derelict.

*El Fuego* as the hulk heeled unevenly under the pull of the line to her rudder.

The wreck slowly swung round, straightened up again as it began to move and slowly gathered headway. The surfboat, its engine turning dead slow to avoid drawing ahead, steamed along with it, perhaps fifty yards away, while Hawkins surveyed the wreck with a critical eye. Satisfied at last that the hulk was showing no signs of suddenly rolling over and engulfing his boat, Joe sheered in abaft the hoses still running from the *Lapwing* to the hulk. One by one he fished them up with a boathook and cut free the toggle lashings against *El Fuego's* side. Then, as each hose end slipped out of the blowing hole, he waved to his shipmates on the stern of the salvage ship, to haul it in.

By this time, the tow was clear of the ring of mooring buoys and steaming at perhaps three knots toward El Morro Island. From the *Lapwing's* bridge, Arenda surveyed the hulk through his binoculars a long while, passed the glasses to his daughter, and turned questioningly to Ramsay.

"As you said, capitán, you have cleared your way to the *Santa Cruz*. What now will you do with this hulk you are towing?"

"Sink her, I guess," responded Ramsay. "It's the only safe thing. I've considered beaching her on El Morro, but we might strand the *Lapwing* in the process and it's not worth the risk. But even sinking

that derelict is a problem. We haven't anything bigger than a Colt .45 aboard, so there's nothing we can do with gunfire."

Arenda considered a moment.

"Ah, I have it! Those bombs you obtained in Coco Solo from *el Comandante* Carroll! Were they not for such work?"

Carroll's bombs? Ramsay's face lighted up. Yes, a few of them exploded against *El Fuego's* waterline would do the job. But he had only six, not any too many to replace his jettisoned machine guns and rifles in case he got into a scrap; it would not do to expend them on a derelict.

"Ordinarily an excellent suggestion, señor, but I'm afraid it doesn't suit our position." Briefly he explained why. "But I have the answer. You know how a sub makes a crash dive?"

"A crash dive? Assuredly, capitan! Did I not supervise the submarine construction for my Navy once? It is simple. The submarine is riding on her vents, with the kingston valves at the bottom of the ballast tanks open to the sea. One opens the vents at the top of the ballast tanks, the air escapes, the sea rushes into the tanks, and the submarine sinks like a rock."

"Well, that's the system. We'll let *El Fuego* make a crash dive. The way she's floating, every hatch in her submerged main deck is an open kingston. All we have to do is open the vents. And since she hasn't any



regular ones, we'll provide one by opening up that hole we patched and letting the air out." He picked up a megaphone and shouted to the surfboat astern of him.

"Surfboat there! Come alongside!"

Responding to the hail, Hawkins was alongside in a moment. A wrench, a sledge, and several wedges were passed into the boat. In a few words shouted from the bridge, Ramsay explained what was wanted, and the boat shoved off, once more to run in close aboard *El Fuego*.

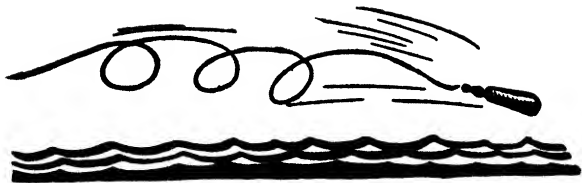
With the tools lashed to his belt, Hawkins scrambled cautiously up the stern frame, along the keel and out on the upturned bottom. A quick tug on the wrench, a few turns with his fingers, and the strongback nut he had labored to secure in the depths came clear; but the patch plate, pressed tightly against the shell by the air pressure beneath, hung immovably in place. Joe pushed the thin edge of a wedge into the gasket space, drew back his sledge and swung with all his force on the butt of the wedge, springing the joint wide open.

The effect was startling. Through the gap, a blast of air roared out full against Joe's chest, staggering him. Joe sprang back, watched a moment to note the result, then hurriedly ran aft, slid back into the boat, let go the towing hawser secured to the stern, and steamed rapidly back to the *Lapwing*.

Already the hulk was settling. In less than three minutes, the water was lapping over her bilges; and

in hardly one more, the silent crew of the *Lapwing* saw only bubbles and froth to mark the spot where *El Fuego* had slipped finally back into the sea, out of their way at last.





## CHAPTER XXV

CAUTIOUSLY picking his way through the mass of smashed timbers that once had been the towering poop of the *Santa Cruz*, Tom Williams dragged his lead shoes through the mud, searching for the outlines of the ancient galleon. *El Fuego* was gone. A formless shadow, dimly visible against the gray sand, marked the spot where her capsized deckhouse had gouged for itself a bed in the ocean floor, while round about, half buried, only a few crushed ventilator cowls and some broken davits remained as evidences of the steel hulk that had blocked the path to the wreck of the *Santa Cruz*.

Splintered planks, broken tree-nails, jagged timbers, bits of oakum, littered the sand at his feet. Tom skirted the protruding splinters of the mizzen, turned in round the corner of the wreckage, leaning forward to counteract the drag of his lifelines, then dropped to his hands and knees to ease the strain and crawled slowly along, scanning the bottom. Here once had been the forward bulkhead of the poop of the *Santa Cruz*—he could see the planking laid back almost intact over the broken framing abaft it. Strake by strake he counted the planks, as he dragged his

heavily-weighted form along, his helmet close to the sand, his eyes straining through the dark water for signs of the spot where he and his mates had once washed through a tunnel down the steep face of that bulkhead.

Tough work, that tunneling had been, with only a fire hose to wash through the sand. And now to tackle it again, if he could but locate the right spot to start. A week's work only if he hit it right; a month's digging perhaps if he couldn't locate the old landmarks.

And then sharply he stopped breathing. There under his faceplate was the tunnel mouth, a black spot in the gray sand, still wide open after five years! Incredulously, Tom dropped flat on his stomach, slid an arm down the hole to make sure. No question, there it was; no more tunneling after all! Lucky break. Williams drew back his arm and gazed about dubiously. Was he getting dopey under the pressure, beginning to imagine things? Often on a wreck, especially those submarine jobs, it was impossible to leave a tunnel even a few days when a storm stopped operations without finding the hole washed full of sand on returning. And here five years after *El Fuego* and her gang of cutthroats had stopped the job, this tunnel was as free of sand as the day they last washed it out! *El Fuego*. Ah, that was the answer. Tom nodded slowly inside his helmet. That capsized hull, bedded down over this spot, had guarded it from the sweep of the currents along the

bottom. "Some good from that confounded wreck after all," Tom muttered. Then, signaling his tender to take up all the slack, he waited till his lines came taut on his breastplae, prepared to slide into the hole; but on second thought he drew back. Black as the eternal Styx down there; he needed light.

Groping for his control valve, he shut off his air, twisted round to his transmitter and shouted:

"On deck! Send a light down my lines!" He turned on his air again. A minute went by while he watched his lifelines swaying rhythmically in the water, then a vague gleam materialized in the sea overhead into a ball of light, shooting swiftly toward him like a glowing meteor. He reached up, seized it as its guiding shackle brought it to his breastplate and slashed free the lanyard to its shackle round his hose. A thousand watt light. He grunted with satisfaction, dropped it down the tunnel, slipped his legs over the edge and signaled to slack off.

In a moment the answering jerks came, the strain on his hoses eased, he felt himself sliding over the crumbling sand into the hole. Instantly the gleam beneath him vanished, a swirl of mud stirred up by his lead belt cutting into the bottom enveloped him, blotted out everything. Down, down through the blackness, his fingers clawing the soft sides of the tunnel, his feet kicking out cautiously, making sure the clearance was sufficient for his bulky rig. He felt the air gurgling out of his helmet, roiling the water above, mixing it with mud in an impenetrable soup.

Down, jerk by jerk, as his lines slacked off, and then the bottom. His feet sank into soft mud to his knees, his descent stopped, he groped in the ooze for his lamp, fingers sliding now down the slippery rubber cable that sheathed its wires. His grip closed on the handle, pulled the lamp out of the mud. But still no light. Had the lamp burned out? He lifted it toward his helmet, brought it against his faceplate. Six inches off, a sickly yellow gleam became visible through the murk. Good enough. Now for the bulkhead. There should be a hole through that. Carefully he felt round the muddy sides of the shaft, gulped with satisfaction as his knuckles bumped the rough edges where the torn-out planks left an opening in the ancient bulkhead. Shoving his lamp out in front, Tom thrust his brawny shoulders forward, eased himself through the gap, and slid forward on his stomach out of the mud into the wrecked hulk of the galleon.

Immediately the water began to clear. With the mud left behind him, the lamp shone brilliantly now, illuminating the narrow passage in which he lay. Curious, Tom twisted his head, scanning the heavy timbers and the roughly adzed planks of the *Santa Cruz*. A little nervously he stared out through the top port of his copper helmet at the sagging bulkhead above him. Once the space in which he lay had been a narrow passage in the hold; now with the vessel on her beam ends, the two sides of the passage were horizontal and the upper one drooped peril-

ously under the load above. That it had not collapsed altogether when *El Fuego* dropped on the exposed hulk seemed to Tom almost a miracle. But wood was like that; it crushed locally under a shock, leaving intact the framing farther away.

Gingerly now Tom snaked his way along, helmet back, weights clattering on the planks, eyes glued to the structure overhead, fearful lest even the disturbance in the water as his air bubbled upward, eddied against the ancient timbers, should start disintegration. Length by length he advanced into the hold, an eerie feeling gripping his mind as he penetrated that silent galleon, for centuries entombed beneath the sea. A glint of white on his left. He swung his light around, as quickly swung it away. Death grinned back at him; there lay a gleaming white skeleton athwart the keel—the bones of some Spanish sentry trapped when the *Santa Cruz* took her final plunge. A little shaken, Tom paused, furtively looked back to reassure himself of his escape and again started forward, his shaken heart pounding violently. Another fathom and before him loomed up the object of his search. Framed by the jagged edges of planks torn from the bulkhead was the opening burned by his mates five years before through the thick iron side of the treasure room. Williams held his breath as his helmet slid over the hole and he tilted his searchlight downward, peered anxiously into the cavern below.

*Gold!*

There it was, in dazzling sheets stripped from the roofs of Inca temples; in broken idols torn from Indian altars; in rough bars cast by the conquistadores from the ornaments stolen from tortured Inca nobles. Everywhere the beams of light sweeping the deck below caught the radiant reflection of the golden yellow hoard, scattered indiscriminately in heaps and mounds of mingled shapes across the room where the torn *Santa Cruz*, hurtling downward in her final plunge, had tossed them.

An insane urge swept Tom's veins. Diving caution, retreat, were all forgotten. He let go the lamp, jerked hastily for slack, slid into the opening, dropped like a plummet to the bottom and groveled on hand and knees among the golden bars, a weird sight in that watery world—his grotesque canvas figure draped heavily with lead, clouds of air gurgling over him, clawing first at one heap, then at another, clutching wildly at yellow bars, inflamed with success, drunk at the sight of untold wealth, literally intoxicated from the exhilaration of over-much oxygen flooding his lungs!

Four tugs at his breastplate, a voice in his ears.

"Time's up! Stand by to rise!"

Startled, Tom dropped the ingot he was clutching, winced as the heavy bar bounced off his knee. Rise? Slowly his fuddled brain came back to reality, he pulled himself together. At the bottom of the sea, even seconds were precious; here he was wasting his dive. Unsteadily he rose, clutching a fifty-pound pig



in each hand, then looked round uncertainly from the sheer iron walls to the hole ten feet above. No use, he could not rise with his hands encumbered that way. On the *Lapwing* no one had ever expected him to get so far; he was unprepared with lines or bags to lift out treasure. Regretfully he dropped one bar, looked longingly at the other. Must he come up empty-handed?

The lamp cable dangled before him, thin, flexible. He seized it, with practiced fingers swiftly threw a clove hitch round the bar and jammed it tight. Feverishly he surveyed the job, then dropped the weighted lamp to the deck and signaled on his line to heave. In a few seconds he was pulled off his feet and rose jerkily through the water till his clawing fingers grasped the iron plates overhead and he drew himself into the passage. Signaling to stop heaving, he gripped the lamp cable and, hand over hand, pulled up his ingot, shoved it carefully clear of the hole, and then, pushing the lamp ahead with one hand and the heavy bar with the other, crawled clumsily down the passage as the tenders above took in the slack of the lines.

Then a brief moment in the blackness while, clutching the treasure to his chest lest he lose it in the mud, the tenders once more heaved him up through the tunnel and he emerged into the dim light of the ocean floor. Still hugging the bar, he strode exultantly round the wreck, mindless now of the heavy lamp banging against his knees. Only at the descending line

did he let go enough with one hand to shut off his air, call out:

"At the descending line! Take me up!"

He heard the acknowledgment, wrapped his legs round the manila line, circled it with his arms, and, with that precious bar jammed against his pounding chest, started his two-hour rise to decompress.





## CHAPTER XXVI

CROUCHING low against the bulwark, his back against a swaying hawser passing out of the port quarter chock, Sorensen, eyes dilated in the darkness, glanced cautiously from the man at his side, scanned the fantail, listened a moment, heard only the splashing of the sea under the counter and the slap of the mooring hawsers cutting the waves as the *Lapwing* heaved gently to the long Pacific swells. Forward, only a few lights from the bridge and a dull gleam from the open engine room doors broke the darkness of the southern night.

"*Bueno*. Here we are alone. Why you want me, Swede?" Pablo's dark face pressed close.

"Yah. You tally dem bars, Pablo. Twenty bars you say already aboard. How much you tank one weighs?"

"Forty pounds, maybe feefty pounds. *Quien sabe?*" Pablo shrugged his shoulders.

"Ay tank fifty." Sorensen's eyes glittered in the night. "Fifty pounds of gold in only one bar, and each bar is worth maybe thirty thousand dollars, Already we haf aboard half a million dollars! Half a million dollars, Pablo! And diving has hardly yet

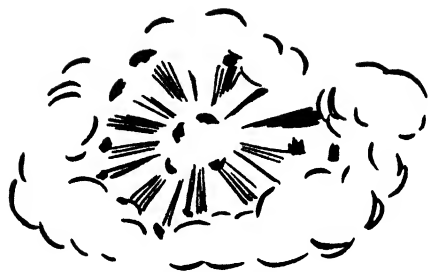
started! Yah! There will be millions yet!" Sorensen gripped his comrade's arm, leaned closer. "And dat bosun Clark, you heard him pass the word at mess, Pablo? Five t'ousand dollars apiece the crew will get when dis ship pays off in New York!"

"*Si, si*, five t'ousand dollars I get. *Es muchisimo*. Never have I had even a hundred dollars at once. No more lousy foc's'les for Pablo. In Barcelona I shall live like Belmonte with so much. *Que felicidad!*"

"On five t'ousand you lif like a toreador? Fool!" Sorensen hissed in his ear, "You ban satisfied mit' notting. Ferget dere five t'ousand! Eferyting will be ours. You tank ay let dem in de cabin haf dat gold? No! When dose divers finish, den oferboard dey go mit throats cut, de cap'n and dat fool Arenda too. Dey haf de lead belts, we haf dat gold!"

"*Así!*" A long low sibilant whistle was Pablo's only answer, then silence while the thought slowly sank in. "*Muy bien*," muttered Pablo at last. "There are fifteen of us, but the captain has the guns. You have thought of that? We have a few knives only."

"Yah, but it is simple. Ay tank dere will be not efen a fight. Didn't ay tal you Arenda long ago was crazy? Like a fool, he brings his daughter along. Listen, Pablo! You see now how the cap'n looks at dat girl? It will be easy. We grab Carlotta—"



## CHAPTER XXVII

"EASY on the winch!"

With his eyes glued to the heaving swells alongside, Ramsay swung his arm slowly in circles, signaling the winchman in the superstructure. Just breaking surface was the hook; below, barely visible in the water, was a heavy canvas bag, its sides stretched taut. Lazily the *Lapwing* rolled to port; the bag jerked clear of the surface.

"Lively now! Swing in!"

The winch started to race, the bag shot upward; another drum spun round, the port guy came taut and the boom swung inboard over the fantail.

Ramsay's arm dropped. The bag shot down, hit the deck and was surrounded by eager sailors. Bill Clark pushed them aside, cast loose the hook, caught it again in a loop in the bottom of the canvas and motioned again to hoist. The bag rose inverted, pouring out on the deck a torrent of water and a heap of golden bars. Swiftly the bosun's mate tallied them, announced briefly:

"Twelve more, cap'n."

"All right, Bill. Get 'em below." Ramsay turned back to the rail, intent once more on the diving hose going evenly out over the gunwale. Far below Frank Martin was taking out slack, crawling back through the tunnel into the hulk of the *Santa Cruz*.

"Shake out of it, you men, lend a hand on them bars!" Clark turned to the sailors staring transfixed at the glittering ingots at his feet. "You, Jenks, you Pablo! Come to life now. What d'ye think this is, a wake?"

Trembling with excitement, Pablo stooped, gripped the top bar, with an effort swung it up and shuffled forward.

"Lively now, Jenks, take the next 'un."

"Aye, aye." With twitching fingers, the little cockney seized a bar and staggered after Pablo.

"Watch yer step, mates," cautioned Clark. "Keep inboard well away from the rail an' don't stumble over them mooring lines. If one o' them pigs slides overboard, the lubber that drops it goes over after it!" Bill watched carefully as the procession of treasure-laden sailors shuffled up the passage, dodging the swaying hawsers, stepping gingerly over the coils of airhose. The little mound of gold dwindled away.

Sorensen slid down from the superstructure, seized the last bar, hefted it inquisitively, then fell in behind the slowly moving working party.

"Ay tank now we haf a hun'erd and forty already. Dat ban about all in dat wreck, bosun?" Sorensen's

blue eyes searched Clark's face with studied carelessness.

"I dunno. What's it to you, Swede?" Clark looked at him in surprise.

"Oh, ay yust ban interested."

"Ye have, eh? Well, I see ye've kept a blamed good count then. Mebbe, when he hears it, the skipper'll be glad to make ye purser fer all that interest. What else d'ye know, seein' ye been so wide awake to what's goin' on in this here spitkid?" Clark eyed him suspiciously.

"Notting, notting, bosun. Always ay watch my yob." Sorensen deftly straddled the bow hawser, turned his face away and quickly followed his shipmates down the forward hatch, carefully balancing the heavy bar on one shoulder while he steadied himself on the steep ladder with his free arm.

Two decks down in the narrow passage outside the storeroom where once the *Lapwing's* ammunition had been stowed, he paused, stepped aside to leave clear passage to the ladder for the now empty-handed seamen who had preceded him, and pushed forward to the door. Arenda, alone inside the storeroom, shoved the door ajar. Sorensen tossed his ingot carelessly in on top the heap at Arenda's feet.

"Dat ban all, cap'n. You vant ay lend a hand stowing?" Sorensen started through the opening after the bar but brought up short as Arenda shoved the door closed in his face, latched it inside and

through the heavy wire mesh faced the disappointed Swede.

"On deck with your mates. I will manage here."

Sorensen's eyes swept over the treasure previously recovered, a mass of golden pigs neatly stacked outboard, then lingered a moment on the lot carelessly dumped just inside the door.

"Aye, aye, cap'n. Dose bars ban so heavy, ay yust tank you lak help." He turned slowly away, with an effort maintaining a stolid countenance in spite of the itching in his palms to seize Arenda, quietly choke him, and revel in that golden hoard then and there. Reluctantly his bare feet padded along the steel deck and climbed the ladder, to find the bosun's mate staring impatiently down the little hatch.

"Shake it up, Swede, 'n lend them tenders a hand aft. Nuthin' here fer you."

Without a word, Sorensen passed him, skirted the deckhouse and disappeared. A moment later Arenda followed up the ladder, nodded briefly to Clark.

"Secure the hatch, bosun. Below I have the room locked."

"Aye, aye, sir." Deftly Clark dropped the little square hatch cover, dogged it down, inserted the strongback bar across the cover and snapped a heavy padlock into place to hold it there. "We can't be too careful now, señor. Some o' these bozos we got ain't above stealin' a bar or two, 'n even on this



spitkid they could hide it till we made port somewhere."

"*Si, es possible*. But now all is safe, and we are nearly finished, is it not so?"

"Yeah. Nuthin' much left but that chest now. Another day 'n we'll crack that 'n clean up everything. Things 'r goin' almost too good to be true, if ye ask me." He paused and swept the horizon, cocked an eye at the sky. "The weather's holdin' fine, too. Well, it's my next dip, cap'n; I better lay aft now 'n stand by the dressin' bench."

On the fantail again, Clark stretched himself lazily on a bench, beckoned two tenders to drag up his rig.

At the rail, Lieutenant Ramsay looked questioningly at Clark, then at Tom who, lolling back against the "iron doctor," was lazily sunning himself.

"Tom, how much time on Frank?"

Williams glanced at the watch in his hand, his lips moved in a mumbled calculation, then answered:

"Fifty-one minutes on the bottom, cap'n. Nine more to go."

Ramsay turned to the dressing bench. The bosun's mate, stripped to his undershirt and a pair of long blue woolen drawers, was just inserting his legs into the neck of a mud-stained suit which Pablo and Jenks were holding outstretched before him.

"Belay that, Bill, it's nearly eight bells. No more dives till after chow." He looked up toward the

superstructure, where Carlotta, earphones strapped over her hair, was perched in the empty starboard boat chocks.

"Telephone there! Tell Martin to stand by. He's coming up."

A musical "Aye, aye, sir," floated over the quarterdeck, and Carlotta lifted the transmitter to her lips. "Hello, Frank! Hello, hello!"

A brief pause, then Carlotta in clipped phrases passed the word to Martin, then repeated it. Joe, "fishing" the diving line at the rail watched it intently, felt it jerk in his hands.

"'One' on Frank's line, cap'n. He's got it." Ramsay nodded, waited. Another pause, then three jerks from below and Hawkins began carefully to take in slack.

"On your toes now. Martin's coming up," warned Ramsay.

Hand over hand, Joe drew the wet lines in on deck, motioning with his head to Pablo to coil it on the rack. The quarterdeck bustled with activity, as one tender drew in the lamp cord, another tended the manila line to the canvas bag on the ocean floor, the winchman gripped the levers on his winch, and several seamen leaped to man the guys on the boom.

"You, Sorensen, lend Joe a hand on those lifelines till Martin's off the bottom." Obediently, Sorensen rose from the lee of the deckhouse and shuffled to the rail inboard of Hawkins.

In silence now, except for the throbbing of the air

compressor, signals flew back and forth along the wet lines—pay out, take in, pay out—as in the depths the diver worked his way out of the hulk, directed those on deck till he was clear, the lamp heaved up, the canvas bag with two more ingots safely landed on the deck, and Frank himself off the bottom, dangling in the water on his lines halfway between the surface and the ocean floor, on the first stage of his decompression.

On the bridge, the ship's bell started to clang. Eight bells. Clark fingered his silver whistle, looked expectantly at his captain.

"O.K., Bill; pipe down for mess."

The bosun's pipe shrilled out and all save those tending lines made a rush for the messroom. In a moment, aside from Ramsay and Clark, only a few figures were left on deck—Williams with the watch, Carlotta in the superstructure, Hawkins and Sorensen on the lifeline.

The skipper surveyed the scene, glanced at sea and sky. A few clouds were gathering in the west, a slight breeze ruffled the ocean swells.

"A few more dives may clean us up, and heaven only knows if this weather'll last. Tom, you relieve Joe on these lines and take Frank through on his decompression."

Tom rose, moved to the rail, slid into Joe's place alongside Sorensen and took over the hoses.

"Now, Joe," continued the skipper, "you and Bill lay forward for chow, get a little rest, and then

stand by for a long dip, each of you this afternoon. That treasure room's about done except for the chest. Get the torch ready after mess, and we'll crack that chest on the next dive. If you two don't clear it out, Tom'll make the last dive after you; and tonight we get out of here." The two divers nodded, went forward, disappeared into the C.P.O. messroom. Ramsay started for the wardroom, then paused abruptly, looked up at Carlotta still in the boat chocks.

"How's Frank making out down there?"

Carlotta's face screwed into a grimace.

"Always Frank sings or swears when he is decompressing. Everything is all right. Just now he is singing but it is terrible. When I can stand it no longer—" Carlotta smiled, "I shall phone him, please to swear instead."

Ramsay laughed, thrust his hands into his pockets and grinned up at her,

"Well, young lady, you let yourself in for this, first by horning in on this expedition, then by taking over those phones. And now you're out of luck again. No dinner for you till Frank's up, unless you want to eat it in that perch up there."

Carlotta nodded her head.

"I'll have it here, if you please."

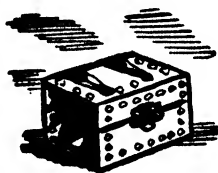
"Fine." Ramsay beckoned to Sorensen. "Tell the cook to make up a tray for Miss Arenda. When it's ready you bring it to her and then stand by to help Tom on those lines again. You savvy?"

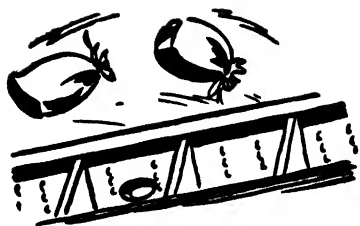
"Aye, aye, cap'n." Sorensen started for the galley.

Ramsay took a final look at the bubbles foaming up near the rail. Everything under control. He turned to go forward, threw a last word to Williams.

"Don't hesitate to sing out for Sorensen, Tom, if you need a hand on those lines."

"Don't worry about me, cap'n, I'll see Frank's O.K."





## CHAPTER XXVIII

IN the little wardroom, Philip Ramsay slid his weary frame into the chair at the head of the table, gazing apologetically from Arenda's starched whites to his own rumpled khaki shirt and trousers.

"I guess you'll have to pardon the working clothes, señor. Today we finish." He looked up. The colored messboy hovered at his side.

"Soup, cap'n?"

"Yes, Sam, and shake a leg. No ceremony today. Get everything from the galley and plank it down here on the table all together. We're in a hurry."

"Yas suh, cap'n, yas suh. Right away."

Ramsay shook out his napkin and leaned back with a sigh. A few more hours and diving would be over. No more of that constant tension of having a man on the bottom, being keyed up every second fearing the unexpected. Absent-mindedly, he broke the roll on his plate, munched it hurriedly, then, recollecting himself, relaxed a bit and turned to eat more leisurely. Arenda regarded him sympathetically.

"*Amigo mío*, calm yourself. We have done well

enough if even we stop now. *Es magnífico!* One hundred and forty ingots, besides those images and ten sheets of beaten gold. God is good to us!"

A smile lighted Ramsay's bronzed face.

"I can hardly believe it myself, señor. Four million dollars at least! And for a diving job, with next to no trouble. But I wish we were back in New York with it."

The door swung open. Sam's black face, shining with perspiration, loomed up over a large tray filled with covered dishes. He placed the tray on the sideboard, hovered over it briefly, served the soup.

Almost feverishly, Ramsay began to gulp it down, pausing only long enough to speak to Sam once more.

"Fix my plate now, Sam, everything on it at once."

"Yas suh, cap'n, right away." Sam started lifting covers from his tray and dished out the fish, some vegetables. "All hands on dis boat am shuah in a pow'ful hurry eatin' today. You'd think dey wuz all shovin' off to ketch de liberty boat waitin' at de gangway, only dere ain't none nohow." He removed Ramsay's soup plate, set his dinner plate before him. "An' heah you is too, cap'n, eatin' lak a niggah in a watahmelon race, faster'n any o' dem no account gobs. It ain't right nohow."

"Don't you bother about me, Sam. I am in a hurry." Ramsay dug his fork into the food on his plate, wolfed another mouthful. "But who's been

kidding you about the crew eating fast? That gang of beachcombers we've got only lives to eat and sleep, and you'll never catch 'em hurrying on either one. They'll be hanging over those mess tables for an hour yet, unless the bosun chases 'em out on deck sooner."

Sam removed Arenda's soup plate, set an empty dinner plate before him and walked carefully round to his left side with the fish platter. "Dat's a fine fish, sah. I ketched it mahself only dis mawnin'." While Arenda was helping himself, Sam bent down toward his captain. "Dis niggah mus' shuah be hopped up den, cap'n, coz when Ah comes by de crew messroom, dey ain't a man in deah—nuffin' but de mess tables covered wid empty plates." He set the dish aside and came back behind Arenda's chair with the potatoes. "An dat shuah am speed; she ain't ten minutes since de bosun piped down fer mess."

Ramsay, immersed in his own thoughts, nodded, only half conscious of Sam's chatter. If he could get those three dives in that afternoon, they were through. Automatically, he reached for his coffee but found the cup empty. Irritated he looked up at the messboy.

"Confound it, Sam, stop talking nonsense and pour my coffee. I'm in a hurry."

"Yas suh, yas suh." Sam hurried to the sideboard and disconnected the percolator. "De condensed milk done gib out, cap'n. You wants it black?"



So the condensed milk was all gone, eh? Ramsay nodded briefly. Probably most of the rest of their stores were in the same fix. But what did it matter now? By midnight, buoys and hawsers abandoned, the *Lapwing* would be under way for Panama, and short rations would no longer matter. Lucky to have held out so long. Ramsay shoved his empty plate aside, lifted his coffee cup.

And then, vaguely conscious of something wrong, he dropped the untasted coffee hastily, spilling half of it on the cloth, but, heedless of that, turned sharply round, listening tensely. Arenda, placidly eating, laid down his fork, placed a soothing hand on Ramsay's shoulder.

"Your nerves, *amigo mío*, your nerves, they are terri—"

Ramsay sprang up, upsetting his chair on the deck with a clatter.

"Nerves hell! Our air compressor has stopped! Don't you miss that throbbing?" He leaped frantically for the door. The compressor stopped and Martin still somewhere in the depths only partly decompressed! Ramsay flung the outer door open, was halfway on deck, when Sam's casual comments about the empty crew messroom came back to him and stopped him like a blow. Jumping back he slammed the steel door, tore open the holster strapped to his leg and yanked out a Colt .45. "Your pistol too, quick, señor! There's something up!" Stepping back into the wardroom, he opened instead the door in

the after bulkhead, in one step crossed the passage leading up to the bridge and burst into the C.P.O. messroom just abaft. Joe and Bill, leisurely eating, looked up in astonishment to find their captain brandishing an automatic almost in their faces.

In a quiet voice, strangely contrasting with his pale features, Ramsay spoke.

"Something's wrong with the crew, boys, and now the compressor's stopped." He flung a key down on the table before Hawkins. "Quick, Joe, up that ladder to my stateroom. Unlock my safe, get a couple of guns for you and Bill and come back—"

Joe leaped up, seized the key and was halfway up the inside ladder before Ramsay finished: "and for the love of Mike, lock the door on those other Colts in there!"

Silence again in the C.P.O. messroom. The skipper, pistol in hand, faced the outer door. Arenda with teeth clenched, covered the door to the wardroom where only Sam with staring eyes and palsied hands cowered alongside the table. Ramsay pulled his thoughts together and checked the fears racing through his brain. How long had that compressor been shut down? Not over half a minute certainly. The throbbing of those pistons was part of his subconscious self—it could not have ceased more than a few seconds before he first noticed it. He bit his lip, with an effort tried to steady down. Even with the compressors stopped, there was at least some air in the balance tank on their superstructure—

enough air in that under two hundred pounds pressure to keep a diver going for twenty minutes, even at full depth. That would take care of Martin till they got him up—if they could. But the crew? What did the strange silence gripping the ship mean?

A slight noise on the ladder. Hawkins shoved by Arenda, a pistol in each hand, passed one to Clark and tossed a dozen extra cartridge clips on the table. Each man seized three. Motioning for silence, Ramsay cautiously opened the starboard door, hung his cap on the muzzle of his pistol, pushed it out till the khaki crown showed just clear of the steel door frame and waited. Nothing happened. A few seconds, and he followed it with his head just enough to peer first aft and then forward along the deck. Nobody in sight. With one jump, Ramsay cleared the door to the deck outside, flattened himself against the bulkhead and stared aft to where Tom at the gunwale should be tending the lifeline.

Ramsay's heart sank, his worst fears were confirmed. The passage was clear. Tom was gone!

What then of Martin, left untended in the sea?

"Come on, boys!"

Crouching to keep below any attack through open ports in the superstructure, and hugging the inboard bulkhead as well as possible, Ramsay ran aft, the others in single file at his heels, Arenda alone facing forward to cover their rear.

Another shock. The fantail also was deserted, the hatch cover to the crew space there dropped down.

Taking shelter behind the towing bitts, Ramsay, with his heart beating violently, anxiously surveyed the superstructure.

Only a useless pair of earphones dangling over the forward boat chock met his gaze. Carlotta too had vanished!

Dizzily the skipper turned to the rail, with his heart in his mouth, looked for Frank's airhose. Thank God, it had not been cut! With a gasp of relief he saw the taut line bending sharply down over the rail into the water, a trickle of bubbles still frothing the sea a few fathoms out. But no tender. Only a streak of blood, inconspicuous on the wet deck, marked the spot where Tom had stood.

No time to investigate that. Whatever had happened to Tom and Carlotta was over for the present. Frank now was his sole concern. A few curt orders. Hawkins, pistol in hand, leaped from the towing engine into the superstructure to cover that; Arenda faced up the starboard passage; Clark, back to the gunwale, covered the fantail.

Ramsay shoved his own Colt into its holster and gripped the lifelines. Half fearing to look, he ran his eye hastily along the hose couplings. Without a tender, had Martin been dropped suddenly to the bottom, perhaps been squeezed to death in the drop? But there was the fifty-foot coupling right at the water's edge. Lucky. What had held him? Ramsay glanced back along the taut line running inboard to the hose rack and found the outer coils

there, instead of hanging in neat six-foot loops, pulled closed under the strain, snarled and tangled round the hook, jammed hard against running out.

Bracing himself against the rail for a heavy pull, Ramsay heaved up and to his relief found the lifting easy. Frank Martin, evidently sensing trouble, had throttled back his exhaust, inflated his suit and lightened up so he was almost buoyant. With every pull, in came nearly a fathom of line. Feverishly Ramsay heaved, disregarding decompression, disregarding everything except getting Frank in on deck before the crew rushed his companions.

A dozen jerks, and Frank's helmet was at the water's edge. And now came trouble. Clear of the water, Frank and his rig together were a dead weight well over three hundred pounds. No use trying to rig out the stage. He beckoned Clark to help him, ordering Hawkins now to watch the fantail as well as the superstructure.

Together, the two men heaved, laboriously hauled Martin out of the water, up to the rail, reached far out, grabbed his leather straps, clumsily dragged him over the gunwale in on deck, slashed off his weights, ripped open his suit with his own diving knife and drew him, pale, wet, and totally befuddled, out of the dripping rig.

With a sigh of relief, Ramsay motioned Clark to help Frank forward into the "iron doctor" while, once more drawing his pistol, he gingerly stole across the fantail and peered up the port passage.

Empty. The crew had wholly vanished; not a soul remained on deck.

The skipper hurried back round to starboard and found Martin just through the outer lock of the recompression chamber, Clark hesitating outside.

"Go it alone, Frank. We'll give you all the air we got. Bill, you stay outside. We need you."

Clark nodded and slammed the door. Manipulating the outer controls, Ramsay opened wide the air to the tank, watched the gauge anxiously. The air hissed in. Five pounds, ten pounds, the needle started to falter, rose slowly toward twelve, came to rest. That was all. Frank would have to take the rest of his decompression at the equivalent of only thirty feet, but with luck that might save him from "the bends." They must chance it. With a shrug, Ramsay turned away from the gauge and faced once more the problem of what had happened with the crew.

Not much mystery there. Mutiny. That was plain. But how could it be successful? He had all the firearms on board; of that he was sure. What could the crew, armed only with a few knives, do? Fifteen unarmed men against four Colts, backed by men who were expert shots—his crew was crazy.

But they must protect themselves against an ambush. The crew was below. They must stay there. He motioned to Clark.

"Bill, batten down that after hatch."

The bosun's mate nodded, padded aft. Swiftly he

turned up the dogs on the hatch cover, screwed the nuts down hard. With a grunt of satisfaction, the skipper watched the last dog fall home. Only one way out for the mutineers now—the passage into the after end of the deckhouse over the engine room. Unfortunately, only a light non-watertight door, which could not be dogged, barred that. Still, one man with a couple of pistols could hold that narrow passage against the entire crew. And now the rest of the ship—engines, boilers, radio room, galley, was safely in his possession. He could starve the mutineers out; S.O.S. for assistance; perhaps, even with his small force, get the ship under way for the nearest port.

A trifle calmer now, he posted Bill inside the passage.

"Hold 'em down there, Bill. If they want to talk, call me. And if they rush you, shoot to kill! Here's my gun. Give me those keys, and I'll get me another one."

Clark shoved the extra pistol, muzzle down, inside the lanyard serving as his belt, fingered the butt a moment to assure himself it would quickly come clear, and then, facing the door, tossed the keys back over his shoulder. The skipper caught them, stepped back onto the deck, panting violently, and for the first time noticed that he was soaked in perspiration.

Outside the recompression chamber, he sat down on the deserted gunwale, tossed aside his khaki

jacket, stripped off his soaked shirt, and, clad only in his trousers, started to mop his dripping forehead. From the superstructure he glimpsed Hawkins looking down at him inquiringly.

"Get the last two guns, Joe, and serve 'em out." He threw the keys, Joe caught them on the fly and ran forward. Threading his way between boat chocks, empty spud lockers, and rows of diving suits flapping grotesquely in the breeze to dry, he disappeared into the captain's cabin.

A few feet up the deck, Señor Arenda stood, his slight figure still facing forward, his tense fingers clutching his pistol, his eyes darting nervously from the forecastle to the thwartship passage over the boilers, poised for an attack from either direction.

"Put up your gun, Don Diego," Ramsay called to the Peruvian. "We're safe awhile now. Might as well ease off while we think it over."

Somewhat dubiously, Arenda sheathed his pistol and sat down on the low gunwale alongside Ramsay. The two men, alone on the deserted deck of the *Lapwing*, regarded each other anxiously, but only for a moment. Then, in spite of Ramsay's logic, instinctively their eyes began again to sweep the empty decks and scan the coils of hawsers, the ventilators, even the rigging and the dunnage on the deckhouse for hidden enemies.

Satisfied at last, Arenda broke the silence.

"Well, *amigo mío*, what you make of thees?"

Ramsay shrugged his shoulders, answered with



one word:

"Sorensen."

"*Así?*" Arenda, dragging his words out slowly, relapsed into Spanish. "Sorensen? *Y por qué* Sorensen?"

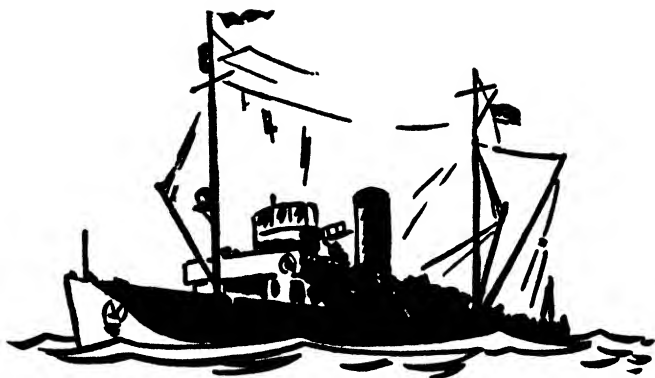
"Because he's the only possible leader they've got. Been afraid of him ever since we cleared the Zone. No reason. Just little things now and then. But I never thought he'd get this far. Didn't imagine he had it in him. And I can't dope out yet what his scheme is. I might have expected a battle with that gang of bruisers on the forecastle over the gold, but not their abandoning the decks quietly like this without a struggle. It looks bad." Ramsay, puzzled, scratched his sweaty head.

"Señor, eet ees bad. My daughter, where ees—?"

Ramsay paled. Carlotta! In his worry over Martin's plight he had for the moment forgotten Carlotta. His heart sank. The mutineers had two hostages—Carlotta and Tom. That was bad. Carlotta in Sorensen's hands! Vividly he remembered that brief interlude on the bridge with the Swede so absorbed watching Carlotta as to forget his steering. Ramsay slid off the rail, started for the inside passage, unconsciously reaching for his pistol, then paused dejectedly as his fingers closed on the empty holster. Beaten, he clambered back on the gunwale. No use, Sorensen had them there. That put a different complexion on it. He looked at Arenda despairingly.

"Eet ees all my fault, capitán," faltered Arenda, "that I bring her along." His voice broke. "My daughter with those devils! *Pobrecita!*" Tears came to his eyes. "*Santa Maria, madre de Dios,—*" He started to mumble a prayer, dropped to his knees.





## CHAPTER XXIX

MISERABLY Ramsay and Arenda, sitting side by side, in silence waited as the minutes slowly dragged along. Through the open ports in the deckhouse they could see Clark and Hawkins, pistols in hand, blocking the passage going below. A little forward of them, stretched out on deck on a flaked down hawser was Frank Martin, face pale and wan, both legs drawn up over his stomach, his right leg twitching convulsively, while he strove desperately to stifle his groans. A "bubble" had lodged in his knee. Over his twisted form, Sam worked diligently, massaging his leg, trying to stimulate the circulation and dislodge the obstruction.

Ramsay looked down at Martin, then turned his head away. Futile. Only pressure would fix it, compress that bubble of air enough to allow it to slip through the blood vessels. And all their air was gone, the compressors idle, the "iron doctor" useless now.

Martin must suffer.

Two hours had elapsed since the mutiny and, except for removing Frank from the recompression chamber, nothing had happened. No move by the crew, no action possible on his part. Without steam on the ship, the radio was dead, they could not even get under way. And he dared not spare even one man of his quartet to go below and try to light off a boiler. Later perhaps he might chance it, but not till he knew better what was up.

Joe poked his head out of a port,

"Looks like a white flag waving below cap'n. What'll I do?"

A white flag? Eagerly Ramsay slid off the rail, entered the deckhouse and stared down the dark passage over Joe's shoulder. No one was visible, but, sure enough, a dirty undershirt was waving at the termination of the passage, flapping from the end of a squilgee handle just above the top of the ladder. A flag of truce!

"Below there! What do you want?" sang out Ramsay.

"Ay tank you like we talk it over?" As he thought, Sorensen running the show. Ramsay held his pistol ready, edged a little closer.

"Well, what is it?"

"Ay tank cap'n, we talk better on deck. Yust promise you let me come back after an' ay come oop."

Ramsay considered. Little danger in that proposal. And a parley might get somewhere.

"All right, Sorensen. When I give the word, come alone with your hands up and I promise you can go back safely. But no monkey business. We're ready to shoot."

"Aye, aye, cap'n."

"Just a minute, boys." Ramsay stepped out on deck and leaned over Martin. "Can you sit up a minute, Frank, and hold a gun? It's important."

Martin clenched his teeth, nodded. With Sam's aid, Ramsay dragged Martin to a sitting position on a coiled hawser and shoved a Colt into his hand. With a groan, Frank straightened his legs and leaned back against the bulkhead, while Sam hovered near to catch him if he collapsed. Ramsay nodded approvingly. The mutineers would see five men ready to fight, instead of only four. The captain looked doubtfully at Sam.

"How about you, Sam? Want a gun too?"

"Not me, cap'n. Ah's a scrapper, but not wid dat. Here's mah weapons." Sam shoved his hand into his mess jacket, pulled a razor and swung it open. "Foah a gang fight, dis am de real McCoy," and he brandished the shining blade menacingly.

"O.K. Sam, keep it in sight." Ramsay walked back.

"Below there! Lay up on deck, Sorensen. Don't forget what I said about your hands, and stop while we look you over!"

The ladder aft shook, a pair of brawny hands rose above the deck and Sorensen stood in the hatchway with his hands up. One swift glimpse satisfied

Ramsay. He motioned Sorensen to drop his hands, beckoned him to follow into the wardroom.

Pistol in hand, Ramsay took a seat at the far end of the table, with Arenda beside him on the transom. Sorensen, grinning triumphantly, slumped into a chair at the opposite end.

"Get up!" ordered Ramsay sharply. "You'll stand when you address your captain."

Sorensen made no move. "Ay tank ay sit too till all hands decide who ban cap'n now."

"You'll stand here, my man, or you'll get below." Ramsay leveled a pistol at Sorensen's bare chest and in a voice of steel added: "That's up to you. Stand or get out! Which is it now? Quick!"

Sullenly Sorensen rose, glaring malevolently down at Ramsay. "Ay tank you ban sorry soon for dat."

Ramsay laid his pistol on the table and regarded the seaman before him grimly.

"Sorensen, I give you thirty minutes to get the men up on deck and back to duty and I'll forget this. Otherwise you're up for mutiny and if anyone is hurt you'll all hang for it when we get back to New York."

Sorensen gazed at him calmly.

"Ay tank not. We no ban gonna return to New York, an' if you ban sensible, no one gets hurt. We settle dis lak gude fallars, yah?"

"No speeches," broke in Arenda nervously. "We'll be reasonable. What you want? Ees not five thousand dollars each enough?"

The Swede, looking sidewise at Arenda, laughed.

"What we want? De crew, dey want now what dey can take, eferyting; but ay ban gude fallar, an' so finally dey ban gude fallars too. We gif each of you five tousand dollar and we keep it de rest!"

At the brazenness of this proposal, Ramsay clenched his teeth to restrain his feelings. With difficulty he managed a smile.

"Very fair sense of justice you've got, my lad. But how do we know you'll stick by the deal and not double-cross us?"

"Pablo an' me, we manage. Yust you trust us. We gif you dat much gold, put you on dat island, an' if you promise besides to wait one mont' before you start, we gif you one boat to sail home in. It ban all arranged."

"Fine. But how about Carlotta and Tom Williams?"

"Dat ban fixed fine, too. After you land, we put Tom ashore mit' you. But Carlotta, she go mit' us, so we know you stay here a mont' an' no start trouble. So den we haf time enough to get to Sweden, to Spain, or where we want. When we ban safe, we let her go, too."

"So that's your proposition, eh, Sorensen?" Outraged, Ramsay glared up at him, then burst out: "All right, we heard you. Now, lay below to the steerage and tell that gang of fools they're all crazy. You haven't a chance, not a gun in the crowd. So much for you. Now for us. You know the *Lapwing* is an oil burner—one man, in a pinch, can fire the boilers

and watch the engines, and it takes only one more man to steer. That leaves three of us to watch that after passage; and shooting the dead-lights out of any thug that tries to come on deck and interfere, will be a pleasure. We'll sail this ship into Panama and turn the lot of you in there for pirates! Now get out!"

But to Ramsay's surprise, Sorensen made no move to leave nor gave any sign even of discouragement at the rejection of his terms. Instead he drew from his pocket a dirty-looking plug of tobacco, bit off a chunk, and started deliberately to chew it, meanwhile leaning negligently against the wardroom bulkhead.

"Now, cap'n, don't you get excited. Ay no ban idiot. Onct ay ban bosun mineself in Swedish navy y'unnerstan'. Ay ban gude seaman. You take dis ship to Panama, you tank? No. Ay take care o' dat. You remember, cap'n where is the steering engine? Yust abaft our compartment, yah? Well, it ban disconnected dere already. One man on bridge, he can turn dat steering wheel all he please, de rudder she not answer. You got maybe a dozen seamen to man dat tiller on de rudder head dere on de fantail so you can steer by hand widout steering engine? No? Den ay tank you not steer de *Lapwing* to Panama nor nowhere else. She yust lie here!"

Ramsay listened silently. So Sorensen was no fool—he had them. With the steering engine disconnected, the ship was helpless. In dismay, the captain looked at Arenda. The latter, with livid face



and flaming eyes sprang from his transom, shook his fist under Sorensen's nose.

"*Nombre de Dios*, thees ees an outrage! We radio to Callao. In twelve hours I haf a Peruvian cruiser here and they shoot you down like dogs. *En mi país*, we no bother with trials for rebels and mutineers. A stone wall, a firing squad an' eet ees all over. *Si!* A steel bulkhead makes excellent substitute for a stone wall!"

"Yah, send your radio." Sorensen sneered openly at the quivering South American. "You tank we ban ignorant what goes on in Peru? Den you ask Pablo. Call dat cruiser. Maybe it ban Capitán Arenda dey ban itching to stand up before a stone wall in Lima. Yah? An' de gold?" Sorensen nodded carelessly toward the pinnacle of El Morro, visible in the distance through the open ports. "Dat island she belong to Peru. An' de *Santa Cruz* you salvage dat gold from? Ay tank she came onct from Peru also. An' dat junta in Peru dat seized de government and executed your friends—four million dollars in gold ban fine windfall for a new government mit empty treasury. You tank dey gif it back to you? No!" A smile of triumph lighted his face as he watched Arenda, pallid and shaken, drop back into his seat, realizing only too well the truth of Sorensen's jibes. "You take de fif tousand dollar ay gif you each an' you ban lucky fallars!" The Swede looked expectantly at both his auditors for acquiescence. Getting no answer, he turned to go, but added, as he stood in the

doorway,

"Ay gif you one hour to decide; dat ban twice what you gif me to surrender, but always ay ban gude fallar."

Ramsay fingered his pistol, lifted it negligently and asked quietly:

"And if we don't accept?"

Sorensen turned, his blue eyes hardened.

"After one hour, we—gif—Tom Williams back to you—dead. If you still don' accept, I no answer for what happen. Anyhow, we wait for you to change your mind, maybe one hour, maybe if the men want, we wait two hour. After dat, we come oop dat ladder mit Carlotta first for a shield." Sorensen looked malevolently at Arenda. "Ay tank we all get on deck mit no shooting. Fifteen gude fighters mit knives we clean you oop; efen maybe a few gets killed, dere ban so much more each for de rest after." Sorensen stopped, moved half through the door. "Dat ban all, an' ay go back now. We gif you one hour." He swaggered out, leaving Arenda and Ramsay staring speechless at each other.

"That son of a sea cook," muttered the captain despondently. "Any way you want to look at it, he's got us lashed to the mast. And just when I thought our troubles were all over!" He dropped his head in his hands. "If it weren't for Carlotta, we could take a chance on fighting it out, but with Carlotta—" He shook his head mournfully and looked at Arenda.

"With that scoundrel, I should fight to the death

even if he has my child, eef only eet was a boy; but she ees a woman." Arenda's voice quavered as he added, "I cannot do eet. We must accept. For you, capitán, I am most sorry. Thees ees my fault. I can do little, but you shall haf at least my share what these pirates leave us."

Dejectedly he looked to Ramsay but the latter remained silent, sunk in deep thought. Finally he looked up and shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Don Diego, but we can't do that. Here we are, a couple of naval officers both of us, and if we can't out-think one squarehead seaman, there's been something wrong with our training. I'm dashed if I feel that way about mine, anyway." He closed his eyes, relapsing once more into meditation, elbows on the table, forehead between in his hands, unconsciously rubbing his temples. "Only an hour left till they stick a knife through Tom's ribs," he murmured finally, then rose slowly and, to Arenda's surprise, slipped off his trousers, kicked off his shoes and announced briefly:

"I've got it, Don Diego! Let's go."

"Go? What you mean?" asked the puzzled Arenda.

"I've got an idea, but first it's necessary to find how the land lies," replied Ramsay, "so I guess I'll reconnoiter a bit. I'm going over the side. Get your gun, captain, and come on. And you might as well take mine too."

Moving swiftly now, Ramsay stepped out on deck.

To Hawkins and Clark, who stared at him dumb-founded, he only nodded, asking briefly:

"Sorensen below?"

"Yeh, cap'n, we let 'im pass a minute ago."

"Good. Now boys, keep 'em all down till I get back, especially Sorensen. No more flags of truce, no more nothing with that bird except bullets. You got that?"

"Aye, aye, cap'n, don't worry. He'll be a sieve if he tries it."

Ramsay straddled the gunwale, seized the descending line and slid quietly into the warm water. Over him now loomed the bulk of the *Lapwing*, slowly rolling in the swells. Hugging the hull, he swam a few strokes aft till he cleared the straight side of the vessel and found himself back where the counter began to sweep gently into the keel as the lines of the ships tapered toward the stern. Here, down on the waterline, there were no open ports, simply small deadlights every few frames to illuminate the lower deck crew space. Over them, five or six feet above the water, he glimpsed the regular portholes into the main crew compartment, all wide open.

Ramsay turned on his back, shook the water from his eyes, and floated a moment there while he scanned those ports carefully. Every one swung open; apparently the mutineers, jammed into the stuffy compartment, wanted all the air possible. Lifting his head to get his ears out of water, he caught floating out the open ports a confused murmur of voices,

loud oaths, excited conversations. Sorensen was evidently reporting to his shipmates; the whole group was in that compartment jammed around their leader, eagerly questioning him.

Fearless now of detection, Ramsay turned on his side, shot in alongside the hull and hugged the steel plates. One by one as he swam by, he peered through the deadlights into the lower room. Nothing but darkness inside. He rounded the stern, vaguely made out the bronze blades of the idle propeller below him, swam up the port side, then came to an abrupt stop and started to tread water. There, face pressed against the aftermost deadlight, was Carlotta, hair disheveled, eyes distended, staring wildly out over the water. At the next was Tom, his forehead streaked with blood, his mouth drooped open, leaning half dazed against the fixed glass bulls'-eye, stupidly gasping for the air which failed to come through the side.

Carlotta started back involuntarily as he swam into view, but Tom gave no sign of recognition. Fearfully, Ramsay stopped, put his finger to his wet lips warningly, and with exaggerated lip motions mouthed the words:

"Keep quiet!"

He paused only long enough to make sure that she understood, then put his head down, ducked beneath the surface and raced forward through the sea till sure he was about amidships. Here he broke surface, grasped the nearest fender line and hoisted himself

aboard. Still dripping, he ran through the galley and out on the starboard side to where his little knot of men were gathered round the after passage.

Hurriedly he beckoned to Hawkins to follow him and motioned the others to continue their watch. A few paces up the deck, he paused, facing Hawkins.

"Joe, you're a torpedoman, and you know bombs. You remember those small demolition charges we picked up in Coco Solo—those you swiped off the *V-11*?"

Joe nodded.

"Sure, skipper, I know 'em. They're stowed in the fore hold, where them machine guns used to be!"

"Right, Joe. Get a couple, make knots now!"

While Hawkins ran forward, Ramsay went a little aft, slid down on the pile of hawsers where Frank lay crumpled up and shook him gently. Frank opened his eyes, turned his tortured face upward.

"Frank, those bombs you boys picked up on the *V-11*, how do they work, fuse or detonate on impact?"

Slowly Martin took in the question, strove to think, mumbled at last: "With fuses, cap'n. They're meant for a boarding party to plant inside the hull. You light the fuse an' beat it overboard before she goes off. They'll burn a few minutes, but you can cut 'em shorter." He stopped, his face twitched convulsively.

Ramsay nodded, patted his shoulder.

"Stick it out, boy; our troubles'll soon be over and

we'll have you under pressure in a couple of shakes." As Frank slumped down again, Ramsay rose and rejoined the watchers aft. Briefly he whispered to Arenda and Clark.

"The whole gang's in that compartment below there, in one bunch around Sorensen, getting the dope on his ultimatum to us. Tom and Carlotta are two decks down, all the way aft, and Tom's a mess. They must have laid him out with a terrible rap over the the head. Anyway, Tom and Carlotta are in one compartment and the crew's in another, and that fixes it. The fools have got all their ports open. Joe'll toss a bomb in there, and those that aren't killed when the smoke clears won't be in condition to put up any fight when we rush them from this passage. This mutiny is going to be settled in about two minutes." He smiled grimly. "Stand by, now, here comes Joe."

His bare feet padding along the deck, Hawkins ran up with a small cylinder in each hand. Ramsay glanced at them.

"One's enough, Joe. You know how fast that fuse burns?"

"O.K. cap'n. I'm used to it. She's cut for five seconds."

"All right. I'll tend you. Come on."

Hawkins and the captain went silently aft. Back on the fantail, Ramsay seized a small line, threw a bowline in the end and leaned over the side to spot the location of an upper port.